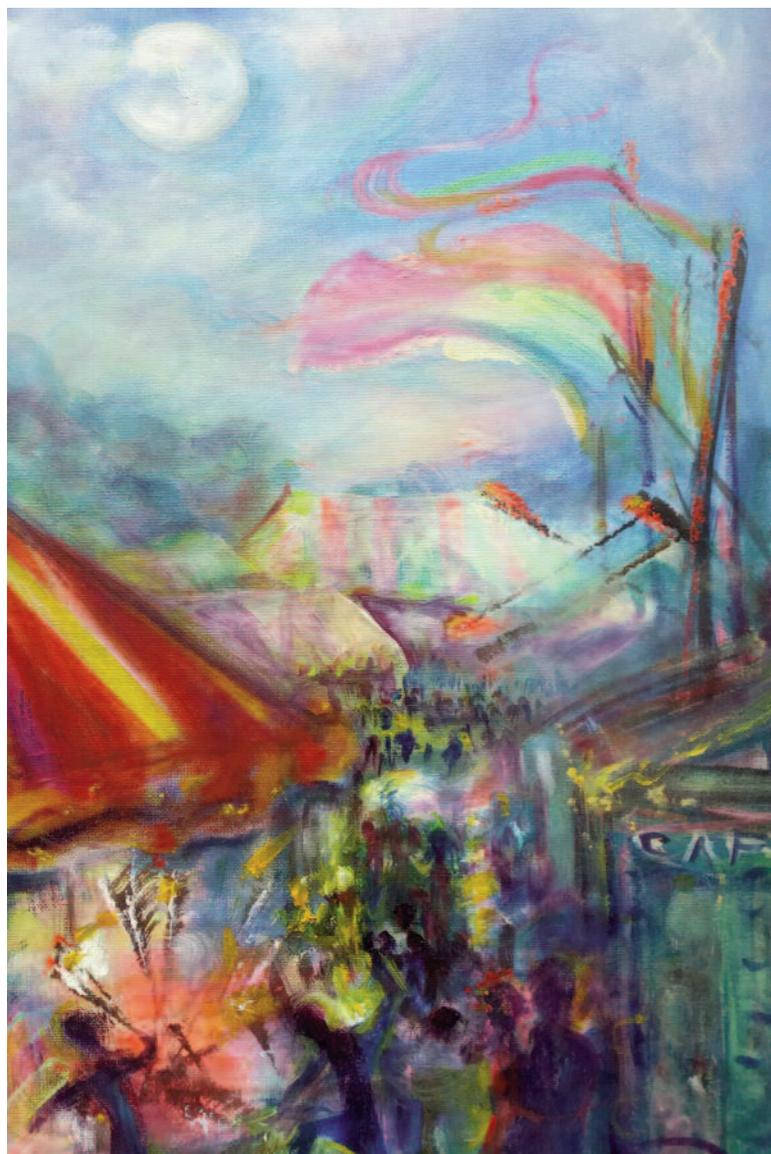


# WRITING



Issue Number 69, Summer 2016, ISSN 1361-8539



# EDUCATION

**“Teaching creativity”**: Louise Tondeur goes beyond the “can/should” debate; Kate Pawsey on “the inner playground”; Kevan Manwaring on wild writing; Daniel Xerri on teachers as writers; Ginna Brock on creative writing through critical reading; Catherine Bruton on collaborative writing in the classroom

**plus**: Sarah Penny working with FGM-affected women; poems for Robert Cox (Argentina 1976–79); The Boat Is Coming (Part 3)



@NaveWriters

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### Teaching Creativity

At the time the previous edition went to print, there were a couple of articles that we chose to hold over. Their focus was on the issue of teaching creativity, and we pitched that as a potential focus for this Summer edition. As a result we have an interesting collection of offerings on the theme.

Louise Tondeur proposes that we get beyond the “can” or “should” debate, providing a useful summary of how that discussion has run its course within the pages of national newspapers. As a publication dedicated to the prime importance of creativity in education, *Writing in Education* must of course go further, and provide evidence – and encouragement – of effective practice. The pages of this particular edition offer both, with a wide variety of reference – from primary school to higher education and community contexts, and by writers working in the UK, Europe and Australia.

Robert Hull’s article about primary school testing provides a backdrop to all this, and a reason why a focus on creativity is currently so urgent, the political climate being unconducive in the extreme. As writers and educators, we have a duty to make whatever difference we can: by making positive interventions in the curriculum and the classroom; by researching the effectiveness of such intervention; and by disseminating widely the narratives of that success. In this respect, this particular edition is a timely spotlighting of NAWE’s core purpose, and as my new colleague Seraphima Kennedy suggests so eloquently on the following page, the political dimension of what we do has inevitably come to the fore.

Underlining that point, we have articles here that reflect on the role of writing in society – and social upheaval. Andrew Melrose concludes his intriguing three-part series about *The Boat*, his project for children about refugees. Sarah Penny describes her work as a writer/dramatherapist with Somali women. And Robert Hull, in his second contribution, shares the unflinching poems he wrote for Robert Cox, who, as editor of the *Buenos Aires Herald*, reported on the “tortures, murders and disappearances” that ensued after the military coup in Argentina in 1976. In one sense, the article stretches the definition of what *Writing in Education* is about. We don’t usually publish members’ poetry; we don’t usually publish writing unrelated to pedagogy of some sort. But in another sense, the article provides – in Melrose’s phrase – an “adscititious narrative”; the difficult truths enshrined in the poems demonstrate the symbiosis between writing and education; and that, in turn, demonstrates why creative writing must be taught. We, as writers, working with teachers positioning themselves as writers too, have a duty to equip future generations with the creative courage to investigate the world through words, rather than just be taught about “fronted adverbials”. NAWE members are marvellously committed to that cause, and NAWE itself must do everything possible to support its members in becoming ever better teachers of their art and craft.

*Paul Munden*  
Director, NAWE

## PROGRAMME DIRECTOR'S REPORT



### *Doors into the Dark: Writing and Uncertainty*

"All I know is a door into the dark," wrote Seamus Heaney in his poem "The Forge". It's a line that comes into my head repeatedly as I write this, in what feels like a very different context to my first column for NAWE's magazine.

These are uncertain times. The impact of the Brexit vote on education in the UK is not yet clear. Research economies rely heavily on EU funding, and those of us teaching in schools and in community projects will be worried about increasing austerity and shrinking budgets.

Many of us will also have friends and family members who may be directly affected by the triggering of Article 50, and we all have concerns over the immediate post-Brexit increase in reports of racist behaviour on our streets. Still others will be teaching on the frontline: in classrooms across the country where the discourse plays itself out in playground slang.

A question I've heard from many writers and activists is "What next? What do we do *now*?" Writers have always responded to political and economic crises, and one silver lining from the Brexit crisis could well turn out to be an increase in levels of political engagement. My thoughts turn from Heaney to the work of Czech poet/doctor, Miroslav Holub, whose poem, "The Door" (widely circulated on social media this week), offers another response. "Go and open the door," he says, "At least/there'll be/a draught."

With that in mind, we're delighted to open the door to details of our conference in November. The extended submission deadline gave us a fresh draught of panels and papers, and we're working on what's now a rich and varied programme.

There'll be fresh air from our confirmed evening

speakers: Patience Agbabi, (whose *Telling Tales* was shortlisted for the Wales Book of the Year and The Ted Hughes Award) will speak on Friday 11 November. Kit de Waal (whose debut novel *My Name Is Leon* was at number 8 in *The Times* Bestseller List at the time of writing) will talk on Saturday 12 November. Full biographies are below, and we're thrilled to welcome them both.

Fresh air is also incoming from NAWE's new PhD Network, who now have a Steering Group made up of representatives from five universities in Cardiff, London and Birmingham. You can read their biographies below. Details of how to join are on our website - please circulate this widely among your students.

In other news: our involvement with Bath Spa University's ACE-funded Paper Cities project goes from strength to strength, and the website for this will be live over the summer. We've also been working with University English and the English Association among others to set up the English Shared Futures conference, 5-7 July 2017. The call for proposals is now live and closes at midnight on Friday 7 October 2016 (see page 9).

We're thrilled that our partnership with Engage and the Max Reinhardt Charitable Trust will continue in 2016-17. Galleries, art museums and visual arts venues in England are invited to submit proposals to host the Max Reinhardt Literacy Awards 2016-17. Three venues will be granted an Award of £6,000 to support a dedicated programme of creative writing and literacy work with schools. The call for proposals is open, with a deadline of Monday 1 August 2016.  
<http://www.engage.org/MRLA1617>

One thing that is clear is that it's time to talk openly about the kind of society we want to create. It's time to strengthen ties between partners, projects, and communities. Over the next few months, we'll be working on the conference and these projects – our open doors, our fresh draughts of air, our doors into the dark - as well as considering longer-term CPD for NAWE members in a post-Brexit landscape. We'd love to hear more about the ways in which you, your students and colleagues are responding to this uncertain time, so please do get in touch.

Seraphima Kennedy [s.kennedy@nawe.co.uk](mailto:s.kennedy@nawe.co.uk)

## 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 full programme will be available online in September.

Venue: Stratford Manor, Warwick Rd, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire CV37 0PY, UK. NAWE has exclusive use of the hotel for the duration of the conference.

Booking is open online until 7 October 2016.

Guest Speakers: Patience Agbabi and Kit de Waal



**Patience Agbabi's** poetry has been featured on radio and TV worldwide. She studied English Language and Literature at Oxford University, and is a former Poet Laureate of Canterbury. She is author of four books, her latest, *Telling Tales* (Canongate 2014), being a vivid retelling of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* for the 21st century, for which she

was a recipient of a Cholmondeley Award in 2015 and was shortlisted for the Ted Hughes Prize for New Work in Poetry (2014) in the same year. "The liveliest versions of Chaucer you're likely to read" – Simon Armitage



**Kit de Waal** writes about forgotten and overlooked places where the best stories are found. Her first novel, *My Name is Leon*, is a heart-breaking story of love, identity, and learning to overcome unbearable loss. Kit was born in Birmingham to an Irish Mother and Kittian father, and worked for fifteen

years in criminal and family law. She was a magistrate and used to advise Social Services on the care of foster children, as well as writing training manuals on adoption and foster care. Her prize-winning flash fiction and short stories appear in various anthologies. She won the Readers' Prize at the Leeds Literary Prize 2014, and the Bridport Prize for Flash Fiction in 2014 and again in 2015. In 2016, she founded the Kit de Waal Scholarship at Birkbeck University, a creative writing scholarship specially designed for budding writers who would not otherwise be able to afford a Master's degree.

<http://www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/nawe-conference.html>

## NAWE YOUNG WRITERS' HUB

**When Lights Are Bright**

Along with *The Shape of Dogs' Eyes* by Harry Gallon and *The Wave* by Lochlan Bloom, my next novel, *When Lights Are Bright*, will be published by Dead Ink in September as part of their innovative crowdfunding project, Publishing the Underground.

The novel is set over a day in Leeds in the near future. 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.

**Publishing the Underground**

Rather than publish a book in the usual way, Dead Ink put forward three titles and asked readers to crowdfund them with preorders. The process was successful and has allowed a small indie press to publish three new, literary titles in hardback without the risk of trying to find the investment upfront with no guarantee of sales.

The downside was that the authors had to campaign. I was worried that the project would end up being a tax on my friends and family in order for me to see my book in print. This view turned out to be optimistic. Almost none of them preordered a copy. Instead, *real people* bought the book. These were readers, supporters of Dead Ink, writers and people who were simply interested in the novel and investing in the project.

The fact that we achieved our three thousand pound total went some way to making the publication feel more valid, no less because I had a personal history with Dead Ink, having worked there, and the crowd funding

model doesn't yet feel like mainstream publishing.

So far so good. But what I didn't then count on was the number of editorial changes that needed to take place; the process of amending and finishing the novel put us over six months late with the publishing schedule. Not something entirely unusual in a traditional set up but an obvious problem when you've already had a number of people buy a book which, for all intents and purposes, doesn't exist.

**Extreme Metaphors**

Why does the life of one child matter more than another's? The novel I began writing six years ago has evolved into something quite different. The enduring images remain. The crowds in the street. The image of a working class schoolgirl. The changing topography of a city. I felt that they were somehow connected and in pursuing these images, and the strange case of Shannon Matthews, I found my own underlying story. In a near future, crowds take to the street to protest as a kind of performance art, an expression of their chosen identities, while others march simply to belong, to try to find community amongst the anonymity. Far-right populism offers the promise of salvation to a disenfranchised working class. A detached liberal intelligentsia debates the parameters of free speech in nearby cafés. James Oisin has made a career of saying the unsayable and in the eyes of the white extremist, John Galt, he has found an enemy who believes he has betrayed his class by leading the opprobrium against the mother of the missing schoolgirl.

I struggled for two years to write the final scene. The novel is divided into four equal parts over two halves – one of day and one of night. For a long time, the creation of John Galt felt overly contrived and hackneyed. I tried writing the novel without him but he kept coming back. He was the necessary and hateful corollary of James' intellectual dishonesty. For all his embrace of "divine violence" and redemptive revolution, he never imagined his call to arms would be taken up by a fascist. Eventually, the character of Galt arrived with white hair and a gun, ready for his revenge.

The events of the last few weeks have put the themes of the book into a sharper focus. The novel seems a sadder

and more sober one now. The dispossessed voted for Brexit. There is a growing unrest. James Oisin lives in a luxury tower in central Leeds, earning a great deal of money to deride the working class. The tower is called Candle House, an impressive addition to the Leeds skyline built on the site of a former candle factory designed to look like a giant candle. Maybe this typifies the changing nature of a deindustrialized city. What does a city do when it ceases to make anything? It industrializes culture, shopping, the project of the inner self as prophesied through luxury. And at night, the tower still glows with the memory of candle-makers, the bringers of light.

*When Lights Are Bright* will be published in September by Dead Ink.

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

## ONLY CONNECT

### Only Connect: Creative Writing PhD Networking Group

At the end of last year, with the help of NAWE, Only Connect was created in an attempt to offer networking opportunities and support to creative writing PhD students from across the country. The first meeting was held at Birkbeck, London, and a steering group formed. It was an inspiring day: we had 40-odd students take part (with more on the waiting list) and there was a lot to discuss. We shared our diverse specialisms, with emphasis on the creative/critical divide, and batted many ideas around about how best to get published, break into teaching and build careers. The steering group, which is now self-facilitated, will meet quarterly, working in affiliation with the NAWE HE Committee to help redraft the research benchmark statement, and anything else that might affect PhD students in their universities or prospective jobs. We will have a presence at the NAWE conference in November, and have another networking event planned for December.

If you want to find out more about the group please contact, Lily Dunn (lilydunn@blueyonder.co.uk) or Philippa Holloway (Philippa.Holloway@edgehill.ac.uk), or ask to join the Facebook group:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/968598163198867/>

<http://www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/writing-at-university/phd-network.html>

Leading the group:



**Lily Dunn** is a published author and teacher, and has just finished the first year of her doctorate at Birkbeck under the supervision of Julia Bell. She is writing a hybrid memoir and exploring questions around loneliness and alcoholism. *Granta* will

be publishing her essay, "The Lost Children", at the end of the year. With colleague Zoe Gilbert, she teaches creative writing and offers mentoring through London Lit Lab ([www.londonlitlab.co.uk](http://www.londonlitlab.co.uk)).

**Philippa Holloway** is a GTA at Edge Hill University where she teaches undergraduate fiction while undertaking funded doctoral study. Her short fiction has been published in the UK, USA, South Africa and Australia. Her creative non-fiction entry, "Energy Crisis – A Memoir of Summer", was highly commended in the 2015 New Welsh Writing Awards, and an extract was published in *The New Welsh Reader* #108. She recently curated a special feature for *The New Welsh Reader*, entitled "Power in the Land?" after collaborative research between herself, a group of local poets and the X10 Power in the Land art collaboration.



**Keith Jarrett** is a former UK poetry slam champion and a writer of short fiction. His debut poetry pamphlet, *I Speak Home*, was published last year. Since 2012, he has taught in schools as part of a pioneering Spoken Word Educator programme. He was awarded a Bloomsbury PhD

scholarship in 2015, and is now working on his first novel and undertaking research on migrant religious communities.



**Zoe Gilbert** lives in London and is studying part-time for a PhD in Creative Writing at the University of Chichester, focusing on folk tales in the contemporary short story. She co-runs London Lit Lab, providing teaching and mentoring for writers, and she is associate editor at the Word Factory, where she hosts salons of new writing and chairs the short story

club. Her stories have been published internationally in anthologies and journals, and she won the Costa Short Story Award 2014. Her first book will be published in 2018.

**Wanda O'Connor** is a doctoral candidate in Critical and Creative Writing at Cardiff University. She researches the contemporary projective and is interested in the intersections between critical theory and poetry. Recent writing is available in *Asymptote*, *Datableed*, *Magma*, *Poetry Wales*, *Zarf*, and *The Best Canadian Poetry 2014* (Tightrope Books). Her chapbook, *damascene road passaggio*, is available to order through Above/Ground Press. She co-organizes the Cardiff Poetry Experiment reading series in Cardiff, Wales, and participates in collaborative projects, most recently with Enemies Gelynion. She is currently composing a film project and a libretto and offers workshops in "Hybrid writing" and "Contemporary Women's Poetry."



## HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE



Our pre-meeting conversations were conducted under umbrellas when the Higher Education Committee met on 20 June and Covent Garden was enjoying a seasonal cloudburst. Our Director, Paul Munden, was in town and able to update us on the prevailing climate in Canberra, an initiative which raised our spirits

considerably. We were also joined for the first time by a representative of the new PhD Network, Lily Dunn, who brought news of the Network's flying start (see p5).

The Committee accepted, with regret and recognition of his valued contribution, the resignation of Keith Jebb. The group working on the Research Benchmark has, since our meeting, been strengthened by Dr Simon Holloway, Lecturer at the University of Bolton and part of the team that organizes the Great Writing Conference, and they hope to have a new draft of the statement within a few months.

Imagine finishing a novel, sending it to your agent and being told it has already been published and therefore no publishing deal can be done. Imagine writing a script and finding the entire text online before the script has even been sold. That, in essence, is what could happen to your work if it is part of a Creative Writing PhD and your university insists that the full thesis is included in their research archive. Even more alarming was the report from one of the HE Committee members that a pirate text of his novel was online three days after he submitted it as part of his thesis, suggesting a security breach at his university. So essential reading for PhD students now are the new NAWA guidelines prepared by Dr Susan Greenberg, which the Committee was delighted to approve and which is now available on the website and printed here below. Susan and Derek also reported back from their very successful meeting at the British Library, where they saw the Ethos system in action searching PhD theses. Thesis text may be automatically lodged in this system if the writer is not vigilant in protecting it.

The date of our meeting meant that the infamous Referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union was still a few days away. After that event it is, of course, uncertain if the benefits and contacts which EU membership offered our members will continue. The legal protection for part-time workers, which strengthens the employment status of writers working in higher education with casual contracts, may not continue. In discussing casual contracts, therefore, we agreed to devise guidelines and highlight best practice on the basis of the Open University's system, using information kindly supplied by Derek Neale. These will be launched in the autumn issue of *Writing in Education* and made available on a NAWE website.

Something to look forward to for all of us is the English Shared Futures Conference, which will take place in Newcastle, 5–7 July 2017 (see p9). This will be the first major academic event at which Creative Writing is an equal partner with English, and we are hoping that NAWE members will rise to the challenge.

Also open now are nominations for new committee members for the coming year, to be announced at our own conference in November, and we look forward to welcoming new colleagues in the near future. If you wish to put yourself forward for election, please refer to the information on the website, at:

<http://www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/writing-at-university/he-network/he-committee/he-committee-elections.html>

And finally, the deadline for *Writing in Practice* 3 closed on 17 June with a fascinating range of submissions. So this is an early reminder to begin planning now for your submission to *Writing in Practice* 4. Summer is the perfect time to get that initial research done, write your first draft or otherwise prepare to submit to NAWE's peer-reviewed journal in 2017.

Submit your work online at:

<http://www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/writing-at-university/writing-in-practice/submissions.html>

*Celia Brayfield, Chair, NAWE HE Committee*

### How to find Creative Writing doctorates

If you are a doctoral student or supervisor, you may be interested in our new one-page handout on how to log your thesis on the university repository. The handout, backed by NAWE and the British Library, gives advice on the use of key words, abstracts, and embargoes. These are all decisions that can impact the student's Intellectual Property (IP) rights and future publishing success. The handout is the result of discussions involving all three groups, who met at the British Library back in May 2016, as part of the AHRC-funded project, "The Future of the Academic Book". The idea for the meeting, organized by NAWE HE committee member Susan Greenberg, started with a simple question: how can we make it easier to find creative writing theses on the national EThOS database? But it ended up turning into a great discussion about where things stand in creative writing research, and the ways in which it may be affected by Open Access. Other ideas will feed into NAWE's research benchmark, which is being updated. The hope is that our conversation will benefit the whole university community, including not just creative writing academics but also university librarians and graduate school leaders.

*Susan Greenberg*

### General Guidelines for Lodging an Electronic Copy of Your PhD Thesis



UK Research Councils and other funders require that an electronic copy of your PhD thesis is freely available to anyone who wishes to read it. This copy will be lodged in your university's own repository and/or the British Library EThOS system.

- Ensuring your thesis can easily be found through searching the abstract and appropriate keywords is important and is professionally beneficial to you.
- Ensuring full metadata also helps future researchers find what they are looking for.

Ensure your PhD thesis is submitted to your institution's electronic repository in one (or more) electronic files, with the following details:

- Abstract: a brief (up to 200 word) summary of your thesis.
- Keywords: choose appropriate keywords including a) subject area b) specific topics.
- Supervisor: the names of your main and secondary supervisor.
- Sponsor or research funder.

### Guidelines for Creative Writing PhDs

The creative component of a creative writing PhD (and sometimes the critical component) may have commercial value. Trade publishers may feel that a work freely available under open access is essentially “published” and thus decline to publish it. For this reason you may wish to ensure that the commercially sensitive component of your PhD thesis is not available under open access. You will normally be able to embargo or redact this part of your PhD thesis.

Where a creative writing PhD can be separated into critical and creative components, you are advised to submit them to the repository as two separate files. You can choose to make one part open access and not the other. Even if you embargo or redact your entire thesis, you should lodge electronic copies with the four pieces of information described above.

Creative writing theses are often difficult to find because their titles tend to be creative and wide-ranging. In order to improve the visibility of your own thesis (regardless of whether or not it has an initial embargo), please ensure you use the keywords “creative writing” and “creative-critical”. It’s a good idea to start your abstract with “This work consists of [a novel plus supporting critical analysis] ...” (adjusted to list your own outputs). In summary, creative writing PhDs should:

- Submit creative and critical components as separate files where possible
- Set independent access rules for the components (open access/embargo/redact)
- Include keywords: creative writing, creative-critical, [plus topic areas]

<http://www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/writing-at-university/research/lodging-theses.html>



### HIGHER EDUCATION EVENTS



#### The European Association of Creative Writing Programmes (EACWP), Turin, 21–25 September 2016

The EACWP will hold its next annual symposium and 3rd Pedagogical Conference in Turin, hosted by Scuola Holden. <http://scuolaholden.it/en/iccws2016/>

#### Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) Washington DC, 8–11 February 2017

The 50th Anniversary AWP Conference and Bookfair will be held at the Washington Convention Center and Washington Marriott Marquis.

[https://www.awpwriter.org/awp\\_conference](https://www.awpwriter.org/awp_conference)

NAWE will once again be promoting UK university courses at the conference bookfair. Universities wishing to advertise their courses should make payment and then submit their advertisement online at:

<http://www.nawe.co.uk/DB/events/nawe-at-awp-washington-2017.html>

Single page A5 advertisement: £350 (NAWE members); £495 non-members.

Please note: the conference takes place early in the year, and the deadline for submitting advertisements is therefore earlier than usual: 30 November 2016.

A PDF of the booklet disseminated at the Los Angeles event this year is available on the NAWE website: [www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/writing-at-university/he-events.html](http://www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/writing-at-university/he-events.html)

### Great Writing, Imperial College London 1–2 July 2017

This 20th anniversary event has now issued its call for proposals, available at [www.greatwriting.org.uk](http://www.greatwriting.org.uk).

Presenter places are limited, but additional participant places will be available.

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### English: Shared Futures A major conference across the disciplines Newcastle Civic Centre, 5–7 July 2017

The English Association, University English, the National Association of Writers in Education and the Institute of English Studies are joining together to host a major conference for the whole of the discipline of English. We believe that the study of English – literary studies of every period, language studies and creative writing – is an important, dynamic and collaborative enterprise. This conference will celebrate the discipline's intellectual strength, diversity and creativity, and explore its shared futures in the nations of the UK and across the world.

The conference will host leading and agenda-setting intellectual research and creative practice, support work in pedagogy and in professional development, offer access to a range of publishers and agents, feature panels from a range of our subject associations, and, with sessions from colleagues both inside and outside the discipline, consider the place of English in the wider cultural and political world. The conference is especially keen to involve Early Career Academics and Post-Graduate Research Students and will have many dedicated sessions designed by and for these groups, as well as involving colleagues from all areas and career stages of the discipline.

English: Shared Futures fosters inclusivity and diversity. We are especially concerned to encourage and enhance representation and participation from minorities, and are proactively working to reduce physical, social, and economic barriers to participation and to develop an environment rooted in a belief of equal respect for all.

### Call for Panels

We invite panels on all areas and periods of English literary studies, language studies and creative writing; panels on pedagogy, or aspects of professionalization; and, in light of the conference's title, panels which discuss:

- emerging, new or challenging research horizons within the subject;
- shared, inter-/cross-/extra-disciplinary research futures for English studies;
- productive intersections between teaching and research;
- the impact of technology on English studies;
- the challenges of funding, government, or institutional agendas to the shape and scope of English in higher education.

In addition, as 2017 sees the conference's host city, Newcastle, commemorate Martin Luther King's visit and the award of an honorary degree in 1967, we also welcome panels which discuss issues around civil rights; anniversaries and centenaries; regionality, migrancy and borders.

We are also keen to explore other kinds of scholarly engagement:

shared readings; workshops; live chat rooms; masterclasses; salons; roundtables; interviews; dialogues; research in progress sessions; and any other new and rigorous scholarly approaches you may want to propose.

Please feel free to use the English: Shared Futures Facebook page and tweet @EngSharedFuture to find potential partners for sessions.

Each session will last 75 minutes. Your application must include the name, status, and institution of each speaker, and a brief description of the panel/session's focus and objectives. It must not exceed 600 words.

Submission deadline: **Friday 7 October 2016**

Further detail at: [www.englishsharedfutures.uk](http://www.englishsharedfutures.uk)

**MIX 04: Writing Digital  
Revolutions, Regenerations, Reflections  
10–12 July 2017**

Another MIX Conference will once again be hosted by Bath Spa University. The event will focus on the intersection of creative writing and technology. NAWE will be curating a pedagogy strand within the conference, and a call for proposals will be issued in September.

**HE NEWS: AUSTRALIA**



The Australasian Association of Writing Programs continues to make connections with significant industry representatives both in Australia and beyond. To this end, the AAWP was recently invited to become a

member of the Australian Council of Deans and Directors of Creative Arts (DDCA). The DDCA represents creative arts issues at a national and international level, and much like the AAWP, shares knowledge and learning across the creative arts disciplines. Part of the remit of the DDCA echoes the AAWP's goals, to enhance scholarship and practice within the creative arts discipline. As President of the AAWP, I was invited to contribute to the DDCA website interactive component called NiTRO, "an online resource which will connect creative artists in the university sector with each other and with their audiences: students and interested supporters outside academia".

The AAWP is excited to work with the DDCA to "provide up to date information and commentary on issues of higher education policy, funding opportunities, research resources, conferences, symposia and events, and national and international happenings in tertiary creative arts".

Two of the AAWP's most esteemed Executive members are contributing regularly to *The Conversation's* series, "On Writing" (<https://theconversation.com/columns/on-writing-524>). Professor Jen Webb, past President/Chair and now

member of the Executive Committee of Management Advisory Committee, has written about the myth of the isolated, tortured writer in "Genius in the garret or member of the guild?" (<https://theconversation.com/genius-in-the-garret-or-member-of-the-guild-60175>) and about the increasing paucity of government funding for the creative arts in Australia, in "It's all about the money, honey" (<https://theconversation.com/its-all-about-the-money-honey-61520>). Editor of *TEXT* and stalwart of the AAWP, Professor Kevin Brophy, has contributed articles on poetry, attempting to answer that most elusive of questions: "From the mouth of babes: how can I call my writing poetry when it doesn't rhyme?" (<https://theconversation.com/from-the-mouth-of-babes-how-can-i-call-my-writing-poetry-when-it-doesnt-rhyme-58732>) as well as providing valuable discussion in "On imagery in poetry" (<https://theconversation.com/on-imagery-in-poetry-60435>).

The AAWP looks forward to receiving abstracts and expressions of interest for our 21st Annual Conference, to be held in Canberra ACT in November. The conference is hosted by the University of Canberra and its theme is "Authorised Theft". Attendees will explore the processes of making creative works in writing as well as having the opportunity to showcase creative works and highlight creative modes of writing. See the CFP here: <http://www.aawp.org.au/21st-aawp-conference-cfp-now-live>.

A multitude of opportunities are available for postgraduate students and early career researchers as a result of the AAWP partnering with Ubud Readers and Writers Festival and University of Western Australia Press for two writing prizes.

The Emerging Writers Prize (<http://www.aawp.org.au/1047-2>) provides a ticket to the Ubud Writers and Readers Festival (UWRF), accommodation for the duration of the festival and \$500 towards economy airfares for the winner. The AAWP provides a one-year annual membership and fully subsidized annual conference fees. The winner will be invited to read their work at the conference, and have their work considered for publication in *Meniscus*. Chapter One offers Eligible emerging writer members of the AAWP the opportunity to submit 5,000 words from

a literary novel, short story collection, or a hybrid work that crosses genre boundaries, or up to 500 lines of poetry from a larger poetry collection. The winner of this prize receives a written appraisal of their work, a letter of recommendation from UWAP, fully subsidized attendance to the AAWP conference and \$500 cash. These prizes close on 30 July 2016.

The AAWP Executive will meet during July at Deakin University in Melbourne to discuss the progress of these and our other projects for the year, as well as the 21st Annual Conference, "Authorised Theft".

Lynda Hawryluk

## LETTER FROM AMERICA



To book tour or not to book tour? When my first collection of short stories, *Smoky Ordinary*, was released, I didn't know enough about promoting it to understand I had a choice. In not making one, I made one. Eventually, I learned that doing nothing to promote one's book had a predictable result: obscurity.

When my second collection won the George Garrett Award and was accepted for publication at Texas Review Press, I resolved to do things differently. As a result, this has been my season of readings. I have given more than twenty of them since *Get a Grip* was released at the end of 2015. Many took place locally, here in Baltimore. My home state of Maryland is in the "Mid-Atlantic" region – an area that is on the east coast and is considered to be neither north nor south. This central location makes it a good departure point for the eastern seaboard.

To the south, I traveled five times to Washington, DC, 50 miles away, an easy trip by car. I also did a reading 1100 miles away in Ft Lauderdale, Florida. To the north, I did readings 100 miles away in Philadelphia, 200 miles away in New York, and 400 miles away in Boston. Beyond the east coast, I made a special point of submitting proposals to the AWP conference this year, since I knew

I would have a book out. I traveled the 2700 miles to Los Angeles for that event, joining an overwhelming *melée* of 12,000 (perhaps less-than-angelic) writers who descended on the City of Angels.

My own book tour was modest compared to some writers, especially because I often relied on air travel, and I went home for long stretches in between events. I have one friend who is, right now, traveling west in a camper van with his Bassett hound to promote his novel. He'll cover thousands of miles. It's not the first time he's done this, either.

Does any of this help book sales? People ask me this a lot. Honestly, I'm not sure. Most writers I know say the same. In that regard, it's kind of like having another birthday – you're not sure it's working for you, but it's better than the alternative.

One thing I can say for sure is that the past few months gave me some stories to tell. There was that one reading with the dogs, for example. Everyone was really quiet as they listened to me read my story, with the exception of the gallery owner's dogs, which were running all over the place, especially across the stage area. They were barking and buzzing past my legs as I read. But you have to picture that these dogs also had long pink feathers sewn into their fur, and the movement of the feathers made them appear almost to be flying, these strange little cherubs.

To be fair, I'd been warned. A writer friend had told me that, during his reading at the same venue, a cat had run across the stage with a rat in its mouth. This would have seemed like a tall tale if not for the fact that, on the night of my reading, the host mentioned unprompted that there had once been an incident in which a cat ran across the stage with a rat during some poor soul's reading.

Queue the dogs...

On the occasion of a different reading, I had a mini-crisis when no one laughed in the usual places or even looked at me. The whole time I was reading, I was thinking, *Oh my gosh, they hate this. Why am I here? What have I done with my life?* At this particular venue, a coffee shop, they had "featured readers" (me) followed by an open mic. The open mic attracted a crowd of regulars. When it came time for that portion of the program, the first

reader walked to the stage, cleared her throat, and said, “I just wrote this poem. It’s called ‘Ham Sandwich.’” It turned out that the crowd had been hunched over their tables, composing poems during my reading.

At a reading in New York, I shared the bill with an Asian-American writer who had been billed as the new voice of the millennial generation. He’d recently been a guest on a national night-time talk show. After the reading, I overheard him say to the host, “Thanks for advertising this event to an Asian audience. I’ve never seen so many Asians in one place.”

“Actually,” I said, laughing, “they’re here to see me.” He blinked at me for a moment, perhaps taking in my red hair and freckles. I gestured to my Asian-American husband who was nearby with our large group of friends and family. I quickly wished I could retract my comment. He looked crestfallen. What would have been the harm in letting him think he had developed a legion of middle-aged Asian fans?

One evening in March, during the thick of my own teaching semester, I drove three hours across frozen cornfields to give a reading on the Eastern Shore of Maryland at a community college. My expectation was that, in such a rural area, few people would attend, and I was stressed about spending the time to get there and back. When I arrived, I found one of the largest audiences I’ve had, especially considering I was the only reader. There were rows and rows of chairs in a ballroom. I learned that many in the audience were earning extra credit for their English courses. *Aha*, I thought, with disappointment. Surely, I would receive a tepid reception, people checking their phones and sighing. However, the group listened with rapt attention for the whole thirty minutes I had been asked to read. They gasped and laughed in the right places, with bright, engaged expressions. Most of them lingered afterwards, buying the book and waiting to get it signed. I spoke at length with each person. Many had never been to a reading before. They were mostly local residents who had opted to take university courses as adults. One woman in her forties said she had recently read and enjoyed a book for the first time in her life. I met a woman from Iran who aspired to be a science fiction writer, but wanted to improve her English first. All of the people with whom I chatted had one thing in common – a burgeoning passion for the written word.

It’s easy to become desensitized, to think of a reading as a task to tick off of a list. It’s easy to think that one’s book and one’s engagement with an audience doesn’t have much impact. And if one thinks in narrow terms about the word *impact*, this may be true. I have often sold no books at all at these events. But the physical object of the book was not why I got into this whole racket. This book tour, something that began largely as an obligatory capitalist enterprise, perhaps brought me full circle – back to what motivated me to write in the first place, that urge to share the struggles of life, to connect with others. I’d thought that the tour would be my chance to affect others with my work, but it turned out that it was just as much a chance for others to affect me. And it seems like that kind of recalibration of one’s inner compass, one’s *True North*, is invaluable.

Kathy Flann

## LAPIDUS



### Opening Up

“Writing gives me permission to bare my soul. Doesn’t need to go beyond that for me; the simple act of putting pen to paper is enough to voice my fears, hurts, joys, wonder.”  
(Judy Hagey,  
[www.judyhagey.com](http://www.judyhagey.com))

Every season brings a different quality to a lifestyle and provides new possibilities for interacting with our environment in diverse ways. Summer is the time when new ideas that emerged as fragile shoots grow to fruition, and creativity may be in full flow. The shift from summer to autumn locates us in a time when we might review any progress we might have made, consider our achievements and set in motion activities that will fuel us during the darker, colder days. This is traditionally the time that educational classes begin, courses that will feed the mind and encourage new levels of thinking and practice. We are preparing ourselves to endure the winter and need to hold in mind the optimism that can follow.

The spring weather brings lighter, longer days and a different sense in the air, encouraging us to wake up and move out of the cave, looking towards new vistas. In the field of writing for wellbeing, there is a similar feeling when we begin work with groups, hoping to inspire participants to open up to the flow of creativity, to move away from hesitation and to engage with a process that facilitates verbal expression.

Lapidus is the UK's national organization for writing for wellbeing, the practice of writing, journaling or creating poetry for personal development, rather than for publication. There has been some discussion recently amongst us about the extent of the practitioner's responsibility and the boundaries that need to be considered. There is a desire to provide a safe, developmental environment where clients can experience the benefits of authentic verbal communication. All practitioners need to engage with the establishment of a structure that holds the participants safely and comfortably, especially when there is apprehension about the prospect of the process.

The fundament of effective work is careful introduction, which helps to provide security and a format that suits the preference of 1:1 or group work and that is matched by the working style of the writing practitioner. Ground rules are a feature of this and need to be devised appropriately according to the *modus operandi* and defined needs of those involved. The boundaries have to be explicitly stated and need to cover expectations of setting, times of meeting, language, social conventions, behaviour, participation, payment and specification of the goals of the activity. The level of confidentiality and its limits need to be made explicit and preferably recorded in writing. All of these can form the contract between the practitioner and the participant and also between the participants of a group. The poetry therapist needs to be clear about the limits to the therapeutic practice and when an individual may need to be referred on to other professionals. McCarty-Hynes and Hynes-Berry suggest the parameters of the activities of writing for wellbeing in their handbook, *Biblio/Poetry Therapy*, (2012: 108): "Participants can expect to improve self-esteem and to work out such common issues as the meaning of anger or the ambivalence many people feel about their close relatives (i.e. siblings, parents or children."

What we are establishing is a defined, protected setting where participants can trust the process and experience inner development, find different perceptions that improve their relationship with their world and grow their creative expression. "I write to take all the terror and tragedy and comedy and banality of life and wrestle it into something I can understand." (Kathleen Caron, [www.kathleencaron.com](http://www.kathleencaron.com))

The use of specific form in writing can offer a framework that assists in the release of personal emotions and thoughts; the concentration on writing to requirements of a format can obscure the discomfort. It can help to hang emotions onto a definite structure. The haiku is a simple poem. In its traditional format it encourages focus on one (natural) image, which can convey multiple layers of meaning, a depth of thought. It can be very useful in an early writing for wellbeing session. In considering the shift that the onset of spring offers, I have written the haiku below.

#### Transposition

A shy white crocus  
Whispers Imbolc's arrival  
A new flame shivers

*Clare Scott, Lapidus Board member*

## MEMBERS' NEWS

**Maggie Butt** has been appointed Royal Literary Fund (RLF) Fellow at the University of Kent, Canterbury.

Several NAWE members are amongst the contributors to the "Paint Her to Your Own Mind" exhibition, opening at Shandy Hall in Coxwold, North Yorkshire, on 9 July 2016. 147 writers and other artists were commissioned by the **Laurence Sterne Trust** to respond to Sterne's blank page (p.147 in the original edition).

**Kevan Manwaring** has won The Essence of Cycling commission, run by the Centre for New Writing, based at the University of Leicester. He has to write 900-1000 words exploring cycling culture, which will be turned into a short film. He has also won a national essay competition run by the AHRC to celebrate their tenth anniversary. His 1500 word essay, "The (Re)Imagined

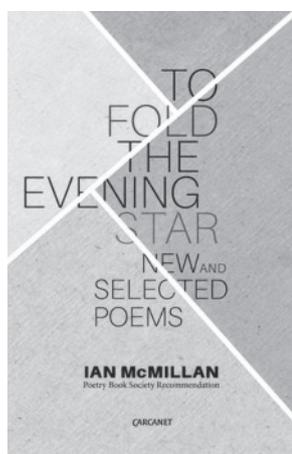
Book", won one of the 10 themed categories (Books and the Human) and was selected as one of the Top 5 submitted nationally by current doctoral students registered at British universities. The winning essays will be published on the AHRC website.

<http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/english/creativewriting/centre/the-essence-of-cycling>

<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/funding/opportunities/current/the-way-we-live-now-the-ahrc-anniversary-essay-competition/>

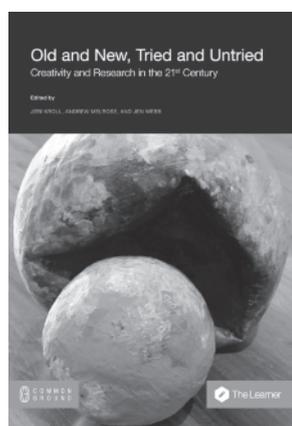
**Ian McMillan**, renowned Bard of Barnsley and Radio 3 "The Verb" presenter, has published his first new poetry volume in over a decade. *To Fold the Evening Star* is a collection of new and selected poems, published by Carcanet, and is a Poetry Book Society Recommendation.

ISBN: 978 1 78410 188 6  
Paperback, £9.99.



**Andrew Melrose** is co-editor (with Jeri Kroll and **Jen Webb**) of a major new book about creative research. *Old and New, Tried and Untried: Creativity and Research in the 21st Century* is published by The Learner, an imprint of Common Ground Publishing, Champaign, Illinois. Available in print (\$US40) and electronic format (\$15.00). Other contributors include **Paul Hetherington**, Sue Joseph, **Nigel McLoughlin**, Julian Meyrick, **Paul Munden**, and **Jordan Williams**. The book is reviewed on page 75.

"This volume represents a timely (and international) exploration of the complex relationships between teaching, research and practice in the modern HE sector, and offers a serious contribution to current arguments about the value of creativity." – Professor Steve May, Bath Spa University



## ERRATUM

We apologize that in the previous edition, a poem included in the "Walking Writing Workshop" article was printed without its author credit. We are therefore reprinting the poem here in full.

### 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 seem to be  
fluorescent men  
everywhere.

Sue Burge

## NEW NAWE MEMBERS, SPRING 2016

### Institutional Members:

Zoe McLain, The Wordsworth Trust, Cumbria  
Julia Bell, Birkbeck College, University of London  
Katherine Roddwell, University of Cambridge, Institute of Continuing Education

### Professional Members:

Diane Woodrow, Clwyd  
Bev Murray, Warwickshire  
Hayley Green, Nottinghamshire  
Anita Flowers, Mid Glamorgan  
William Gallagher, West Midlands  
Denise Saul, London  
Sarah Mitton, Worcestershire  
Hadiru Mahdi, Surrey  
Victoria MacKenzie, Fife

Tanaka Mhishi, London  
 Claire Gale, Essex  
 Christy Ducker, Northumberland  
 Caroline Jester, Worcestershire  
 Beverley Birch, Suffolk  
 Diane Jackson, Oxfordshire  
 Jenni Pascoe, Tyne & Wear  
 Caroline Bentley-Davies, Lincolnshire  
 Eleanor Rees, Liverpool  
 Katherine Morgan, Cornwall  
 Elizabeth Sarkany, London  
 Rob Mimpriss, Bangor  
 Seamus Kelly, Lancashire  
 Chris Simms, Cheshire  
 Anna Barker, County Durham  
 Elizabeth Champion, South Yorkshire  
 Dale Hannah, Lancashire  
 Michelle Gordon, Worcestershire  
 Pat Edwards, Powys  
 Emma McAlister, Dorset  
 Marvin Close, East Riding of Yorkshire  
 Antony Wootten, North Yorkshire  
 Marie Larkin, East Sussex  
 Charles Bell, Kent  
 Jon Sayers, London  
 Antosh Wojcik, Oxfordshire  
 Carol Graham, Herefordshire  
 Toby Champion, Leicestershire  
 Rosie Godfrey, North Devon  
 Shey Hargreaves, Norfolk  
 Helen Ivory, Norfolk  
 Eloise Williams, Pembrokeshire  
 Louise Glasscoe, Derbyshire  
 Michael Woods, Worcestershire  
 Olivia Levez, Worcestershire  
 Darren Wright, Bangor  
 Sophie Snell, Derbyshire  
 Colin MacLeod, Glasgow  
 Sara O'Connor, Buckinghamshire  
 Karen Ball, London  
 Nicole May, Manchester  
 Charlotte Thompson, London  
 Anna Robinson, London

**Associate/Student Members:**

Lois Maddox, Avon  
 Felicity Stephen, East Sussex  
 Michelle Rose, Merseyside

Penny Simpson, Essex  
 Kylie Fitzpatrick, Somerset  
 Suzanne Finch, Flintshire  
 William Badger, Oxfordshire  
 Laura Sands, Surrey  
 Claudia Davidson, Surrey  
 Doris Ghafari-Kanno, Lancashire  
 Paul Pattison, Cambridgeshire  
 Zee Younus, West Yorkshire  
 Lynn Clausen, Powys  
 William Park, Lancashire  
 Tracy Gillman, County Durham  
 Lauren Merin, London  
 Grace Quansah, London  
 Virginia Lowes, South Yorkshire  
 David Chang, Buckinghamshire  
 Helena Oberg, Sweden  
 Gillian Doherty, London  
 Sonia Lambert, London  
 Sarah Leppington, West Midlands  
 Jolynn Boudreau, Canada  
 Matthew Tett, Wiltshire  
 Romana Turina, North Yorkshire  
 Catherine Taylor, North Yorkshire  
 Thomas Brown, Oxfordshire  
 Joanne Ashcroft, Merseyside  
 Sam Meekings, West Sussex  
 Laura McKenna, Republic of Ireland  
 Amy Lovat, Australia

**Young Writer Members:**

Mary Fletcher, Staffordshire  
 Megha Harish, London  
 Mark Gayton, Essex  
 Caitlin Stratford, North Yorkshire

**E-Members:**

Alice Patterson, Surrey  
 Palaniappan Saravanan, Wirral  
 Daniel Allen, East Sussex  
 Sandra Slight, Surrey  
 Bernardo Bueno, Brazil  
 Jessica Chapham, Ynys Mon  
 Jennie Owen, Lancashire  
 Dennis Lewis, Qatar

# The Ring

## Writing a collaborative novel with 11–18 year-old students

Catherine Bruton



76, 324 words. 59 chapters. 40+ authors – a collaborative novel with a timespan ranging from Neolithic times to the present day (and beyond!) with chapters written by pupils aged 11–18, as well as teachers, librarians, parents and even published authors. One student editor, one English teacher (who frequently wondered if she'd bitten off rather more than

she could chew) – *The Ring* was an epic project, born in the feverish imaginations of a school creative writing group that burgeoned into something strange, brilliant and beautiful. Oh, and it wasn't our first collaborative novel – it was actually our fourth, the second that we'd managed to finish. So, as the authors of two finished and two failed collaborative projects who have lived to tell the tale, would we recommend the enterprise? And what did we learn along the way about the pleasures – and perils – of collaborative writing projects along the way?

Personally, I blame Geoff Ryman! It was his novel *253* that started it all. I'd run creative writing groups in schools before and knew that no two groups are ever the same. Some like to workshop pieces they are working on at home, others like you to bring along fun writing exercises, some just want quiet space to write. They all – without exception – need biscuits to fuel their creativity! The group I established when I first started at King Edward's school, Bath, in 2010 were hungry for new ideas, new projects to get their teeth into. So one week I

took along Geoff Ryman's *253* – the first ever interactive internet novel. Check it out at <http://www.ryman-novel.com>.

The concept is simple. There are seven carriages on an underground train, each with 36 seats. With the driver, that makes 253. Each of the 253 passengers has one page devoted to them. Each story is told in exactly 253 words. Each passenger is described in three ways. *Outward appearance*: does this seem to be someone you would like to read about? *Inside information*: sadly, people are not always what they seem. *What they are doing or thinking*: many passengers are doing or thinking interesting things. Many are not.

As you read you discover strange and unexpected connections between some of the characters. Some stories finish or explain others. Some stand alone. All are ultimately bound together by the events that occur as the novel progresses.

So it was only supposed to take up one session. We'd all have a go at a 253 character, I thought. Put them on the 38 bus to Bath. But as students started reading out their pieces, excitement mounted, spin-off stories started to emerge, students dreamt up brothers sisters, lovers, enemies for each other's passengers; we created a seating plan of the bus. Of course there was a bomb on the bus, and a suicidal driver, a time-travelling cyber sleuth, a character from a novel, two members of the creative writing group, the headmaster, Elizabeth 1, a stowaway... and many, many more.

Now this is my first piece of advice. If you want to do a collaborative novel, do *not* let contributors hand-write

stuff or you will spend your evenings attempting to decipher teen handwriting as you type up reams of stories. That said, if I hadn't been doing that, it might never have taken off as it did, because as I typed I started to see the whole story emerging. I tinkered a little, drew in little clues and connections, came back each week with the new stories typed up and a list of questions and suggestions for the students. What would happen if ...? Can you write a character who explains this? Finish the tale started by the passenger in seat 26?

I had to think about how to order them, to create a supra narrative, tying all the stories together. So at the very end of the journey we inserted an event that would impact on all of the passengers in one way or another. And the ending came in the form of a newspaper article – written in *The Bath Chronicle* in the aftermath of the inevitable crash/terrorist attack/freak accident (I can't possibly give away the ending) – which gave a sneak peak into the outcome for each of our 38 passengers on the No. 38 bus. The whole group decided on the fates of each character – some happy endings, some not so, some left hanging in the air. Some of our own members did not survive!

Somehow, rather accidentally I suspect, the whole plan came beautifully together. We published in pamphlet form, sent a copy to Geoff Ryman, posted it on some online forums, had some nice feedback – the group were buzzing.

So when the new academic year started, they were hungry to start a new one. My second piece of advice is don't attempt this two years in succession. These projects need a colossal amount of energy and commitment from everyone involved and a bit of fallow time is needed to recover and regroup. Naturally, I didn't take my own advice and launched right back in. This time we were inspired by the novel *Wonder* by RJ Palacio: a story initially told by a central individual and then retold and developed through the perspective of siblings, parents, friends and teachers, each revealing how the central story touched them. Simple. No?

I wrote the first chapter over the summer holidays. *Invisible Friends* it was called, about a kid – Be – with an invisible friend, for whom I created a range of family members (divorced parents, a kid sister, a teenage older sibling), teachers, friends, enemies – from Kevin the



Asbo to No-longer-Lesbian Leloo, even a talking dog (I knew my kids). I devised a narrative arc based around a spelling bee competition – first round, second round, finals. I drew up a synopsis of what happens to Be at each point in the story. We read my chapter then pupils chose a character and started writing their own.

It started brilliantly. There was a load of energy, fantastic subplots started sprouting, connections were made, pupils worked collaboratively on plot-lines, character arcs, relationships – everyone was talking about *Invisible Friends*. Dozens of new super-keen new members joined the group and started inventing even more characters. We even set up an online folder for all chapters to be stored in (very high tech this time!).

We got as far as the third round before the wheels came off. Two things happened. Firstly, story lines proliferated so far that nobody could keep up with them – kidnapped guinea pigs, eating disorders, gender identity disorder, alien invasion. And, unlike “38” where genre confusion and narrative fragmentation were the order of the day, in this story we needed narrative consistency, consensus on key events. Characters started to be in two places at once, behaving schizophrenically from one chapter to the next, demanding subplots on their subplots. As an editor I was fire-fighting, not wishing to curb the crazy imaginations of my young writers, but knowing that the plot was growing way, way out of control and not sure what to do about it,

My next piece of advice is to expect drop-outs. Some

young authors won't last the course – they'll join Lego Robotics Club or Knitting Club, or get a high maintenance girlfriend ... one even moved to Australia! This hadn't mattered in "38" because if a character only featured once then disappeared it wasn't a problem. If a story was left unfinished another student would write an ending for it. But this time, the loss of central characters *did* matter. When the two year 7s who were co-writing chapters for Crystal the mean girl fell out with each other and both started writing different versions of her story ... and the guinea pig assassination plot was left hanging mid-murder ... I figured it was time to call it a day and assess what we'd achieved – and why it hadn't worked.

That was actually a very valuable thing to do. Sometimes I wonder if my young writers learned more – or at least as much – from the *Invisible Friends* failure as they did from our completed projects. It led to discussions about planning and plotting, about working on character questionnaires *before* starting to write (we found lots of sample ones online and had fun quizzing our characters about everything from the contents of their fridge to what they do first thing on a Sunday morning, their favourite shoe colour and their earliest memory), about character arcs, dealing with subplots, writing in different genres.

I went on Twitter and asked authors to send me photos of how they planned their stories and the work they did on character before they started writing. And the results were fascinating and as varied as the authors who were kind enough to reply. We looked at various theories of story-mapping (The Hollywood Orphan-Wanderer-Warrior-Martyr theory; the 12-stage Monomyth structure etc.). We also asked authors to share their unfinished novels' stories and learned that unfinished does not mean failed. Yes, we had learned that over-ambition can lead to disaster, but we also learned that all writing exercises the writing muscles and therefore no writing is ever a waste of time. Some students even took the pieces they'd started and reworked them into something else.

Still, we were a bit bruised after *Invisible Friends* – frankly I was exhausted. So we went back to working on small projects. We created a magazine of writing fragments and posted it up "guerrilla style" around school. We used the brilliant *642* writing ideas book, we

told the stories of items found in a lost property office, wrote list poems, da-da poems, noun + 6 pieces. We brought in objects and gave them voices, wrote one-sided telephone conversations, arranged a ghost story spooky-speak-out session, entered competitions, wrote Christmas fragments ...

It was two years before we tried a collaborative novel again. Lesson number 7 (or whatever number I'm up to) is never repeat an old idea. *Flight B17* was a lazy idea from me, really. An attempt to relaunch the bus – same basic concept, a plane (named after the room we met in), lots of passengers, intersecting lives etc. I printed off a seating plan, we all discussed reasons for the disappearance, planned out a narrative arc. Several red-herring plots were planted – terrorists, Bermuda triangle theories, time travel, alien invasion. Excitement buzzed once again.

The tweak I added was, in retrospect, foolish. Having spent so much time discussing the need to plan novels, I'd failed to realize the obvious – that the opposite is necessary in collaborative pieces. Plan too closely and you get in more of a muddle. But I suggested a three-part structure. With the plane set to disappear off radar at midnight, I suggested we all pick a passenger or two, tell their stories ten minutes before the disappearance, then again at midnight, then ten minutes after. Oh how foolish I was!

The next lesson I learned is that while there are great advantages to getting students to type their own stories, it rather stifles the tendency to share work. Somehow when we'd all been sitting round a table, scribbling on bits of A4, passing round the scraps of stories, pupils tended to read each other's stuff and that led to a more collaborative process. This time we were sitting at computer terminals, saving work in Word documents, and it didn't work so well. Some did go into the shared folder and read each other's work, but fewer students wanted to read stuff out, and a more self-conscious culture prevailed. That may have been the result of the individuals involved, but I think the computer culture didn't help. Which is a tricky one because – honestly – the teacher typing up thousands of words is not the way to go either.

I also appointed two student editors. They were both ambitious, bright and extremely keen Year 9s who had

missed out on contributing to “38”, but had been keen Year 7 contributors to *Invisible Friends* and were desperate to be part of a finished novel. They set to with gusto and are to be commended for their valiant efforts to rally the project and bring it to a conclusion. But I’d given them too large a task.

And the timeline had been a bad idea. I gave students three weeks to write their first piece, then suggested we all move on to the next ten-minute slot. Some avaricious writers had already created several characters and were two steps ahead – they’d crashed the plane, landed on islands, landed in the sea, gone through gaps in the space-time continuum, seen off terrorists, fought off aliens, changed the course of medieval history ... others were still in the past, struggling to finish their first story.

Meanwhile the pilot had dropped out of the sky (due to GCSE study-leave commitments) and nobody could quite keep track of whether the co-pilot was collaborating with the terrorists (one of whom kept disappearing off to school play rehearsals) or who was even flying the plane anymore.

My teen editors got demoralized. When they attempted to finish unfinished stories the originators returned and took offence. (NB: it’s a lot easier to deal with this as a teacher than as a peer!) My timing was off too. I’d started mid-way through spring term and these things take two terms – summer exams inevitably disrupt the group. And then summer holidays came and the plane sank in the ocean.

It left me and the plucky Year 9s, however, with a steely determination to learn from our mistakes and come up with a project that actually worked. We sat in the library in the last week of term and shared our thoughts. Holidays looming, exams were over, time for imaginations to run a little free. And we dreamt up the idea of *The Ring*.

What we needed, they said, was a project that allowed everyone to write in whatever style they wanted – Gothic, Mills and Boon, Sci-Fi, Dystopia, even poetry or drama – any form, genre or voice should be welcome. It should not require internal consistency in the narrative. If links arose between stories naturally, that was fine, but internal contradictions needed to be factored in and

embraced in the concept. It should allow for drop-outs without that jeopardizing other parts of the narrative. But it needed something to link it all together or it would just be a collection of disparate stories. And it needed a really, really simple narrative structure. We decided to tie the stories together with an object that could have multiple functions/meanings/roles, that could fit into a story in any place set at any time. We considered a book, a necklace, then settled on a ring. Gold in colour, engraved with a curious inscription in an unknown language. Nobody could know the origin of the ring or the true extent of its powers.

We started in earnest in the Autumn term. I set up a few rules – the most important was that the ring could not be in two places at once. This, by the way, proved vital. I made a time line (out of bits of sugar paper stuck together) which we rolled out on the floor. Students signed up for the dates in which they wanted to set their story. The second rule was that the story could not go into the future. (The only person who broke the rule was a pesky History teacher – ironic or something, I think!) The third was to have no stories longer than 1000 words (this saved my sanity). And the last was that the narrative would be linear.

Otherwise anything was possible. The ring need not manifest itself equally to all. Some characters might experience its supernatural potency, its magical pull, its seductive lure. To others it could simply be a band of gold – a wedding ring, an heirloom, a love token. And written into the whole concept was the conceit of narrative gaps. There was no need to create links between the tales. The ring would be the element – sometimes the only element – that tied the stories of this collaborative “novel” together. There might emerge strange, sometimes hidden connections between the tales for the sleuth-savvy reader to nose out. But there would inevitably be gaps in the narrative within which untold stories could lurk. Unanswered questions to get the reader’s imagination bubbling! How *did* the novel get from Ancient Egypt to France in 2500BC? Don’t ask us. And we didn’t need to explain how it found its way from the grave of Mary Queen of Scots to Shakespeare’s Globe, or from the hands of Albert Einstein to the mud of Normandy Beaches. That would be for the reader to figure out.

And that’s what made it work. The tales that we spun

were many and varied – just like the talented writers who made up the Creative Writing Society. And if some lost interest or were recruited by School Choir or the Environmental Action Group, then the unfinished stories were just more narrative gaps.

As the project grew we decided to open our pages to other authors too – parents, teachers, former students, even the odd celebrity author: some such individuals are part of the KES community and some were just drawn by the lure of such an ambitious project.

I wasn't sure what the response would be from parents and teachers, but within minutes of sending out an email, I was bombarded with responses. And the enthusiasm of the adults galvanized the students. They got a bit competitive – one mother and daughter wrote consecutive stories, accidentally at first, but ended up collaborating to create links. I went on Facebook and Twitter again and asked authors if they'd like to be involved. Alex Campbell and Elen Caldecott sent in stories. We are lucky enough to have parent authors too; Anna Wilson and Rachel Heath wrote chapters and submitted them. The school librarian, a history teacher, even a former member of Creative Writing Group – now studying Creative Writing at Lancaster University – sent in a chapter.

The thing continued to grow. I knew it needed a beginning and an end so I appointed two stalwart members to open the story – one with a piece set in 2016, when the ring was found in the Lost Property office on the Bakerloo Line (a little nod to Geoff Ryman again!) and another to create a mythology for the origins of the ring.

And it kept growing. I had a book of my own to finish. I reasoned I could ignore the chapters piling in till that was done. I set a deadline of half term. Then I sat down and faced the colossal task. The structure was easy, linear: every piece was dated, history was going in only one direction (apart from Pesky Mr Thomas's story!) so that was easy enough. But, oh, it was *huge*!

I started with top-line edits. And I'm going to confess now that I didn't do a thing with the adults' stories. Because I'm a coward and a wimp and it was just so nice of them to get involved and I didn't know how adults would take to being edited. So I went through the

student pieces only. I used the "Review" function on Microsoft Word and started off using "track changes" until I quickly realized that on some pieces – where perhaps spelling and grammar was not so secure – it looked like their work was covered in angry red. So I stopped tracking and discreetly added necessary commas, changed word order, tidied up sentences etc.

But mainly at this stage I added comments and suggestions (again, this is very easy using the Review tab, "New Comment"). What sort of things did I put? Well, you can see from the example (on page 22) that I often asked questions, queried motivation, asked for more information, suggested way to show not tell, pondered how something could be more dramatic, or suggested they break up the dialogue with some description, or just find out if the post box had been invented or parasols were actually used in that era. If I'd inserted a sentence to finish something or added a detail, I flagged it up and suggested that the student write their own version in their own words.

After half term, I talked to students about the stages of the editing process, showing them examples from my own novels (see opposite). Then they set to work revising their own pieces. Some took to this process better than others. Some went beyond my suggestions and scrutinized their own work with an editorial eye, others challenged every comment and suggestion and refused to change a thing. Again, we went on Twitter and asked writers how they felt about being edited and found that published authors find the process as challenging as their younger counterparts.

At this stage I also printed out a draft version for all the contributors and encouraged them to read other stories and see if they could create links within their own, or to write new stories that answered some of the unanswered questions. A few took this idea on board and ran with it.

One Year 11 student who had helped me to proof-read had an overview of the whole thing, so he and I discussed how it should all end. We decided to bring things full circle, to ask the student who had written the opening mythology of the ring to write a second piece that blew his original theory to pieces. What he wrote was mind-blowing. Then my student editor created an alternative version, incorporating clues sown

and she! I think Ellie is aware of this.

Do-!?!

'I bet you're as good as she is too,' Nancy went on, flinging herself down on her bed amidst all the muddle. 'I just have a feeling about it, Looking at you.'

'How can you tell if I'm any good at gym just by looking at me?'

'I don't know,' said Nancy. 'But I can. Maybe it's psychic or ESP or something - I am reckons I'm a bit weird like that, you know.'

Ellie giggled.

'I just have a feeling about you, Ellie Trengilly,' Nancy went on. 'And it's not just your name that makes me think you're a champ.'

Just then there was a knock on the door and Ellie turned round to see a face peeping into the room. 'Can we come in?'

The door opened to reveal a tiny girl with a round face, big velvety dark eyes and sticky out ears, which combined with the two little buns she wore on each side of her head to give her the appearance of a baby monkey. She was standing next to a taller girl with golden hair, a flawless complexion and green cat-like eyes.

'Bella! Scarlett!' squeaked Nancy, jumping off the bed in excitement. 'Meet Ellie, my new roomie and our new squad buddies. Ellie, meet the Floor Fairy, Bella Ho, and Queen of the Beam, Scarlett Adams.'

Bella smiled broadly and said in a soft voice, 'Welcome to the madhouse,' but Scarlett narrowed her eyes and asked, 'I heard you haven't even passed Compulsory 2 yet?'

'Scarlett, there's no need to interrogate the poor girl,' said Bella, who had a quiet gentle authority, despite being so small she even made Ellie look like a giant.

'It's OK,' said Ellie. 'Scarlett's right. I didn't start National Grades till I was quite old. My coach didn't think I was ready.'

Revised to avoid rep. Nancy says this on p. 17

Sounds a bit adult Revised to sound more teen/girlish?

"Couldn't sleep," she lied.

Joe was looking at her in a slightly puzzled way as he did when he didn't believe something was completely true. She knew Joe was not one to be fooled easily and she could tell he wasn't convinced but she didn't care. He could think what he liked.

Joe was used to Emily confiding her deepest thoughts with him and he liked it when she did but this time there was just no way she was going to tell him the truth.

As she took her normal place at the bar on the stool next to the wall, she thought of what she and her friends would do next.

"I could ask you the same thing, Emily," Jasper replied with one of his infectious flashing, toothy grins. There was something about Jasper that just made her smile; maybe it was because she always had a stomach ache after being with him from laughing too much - or maybe it was the way he raised his eyebrows. Whatever it is, just about everything he did made her hysterical. She couldn't believe of all the people she could bump into, it was Jasper.

"Where's Henry? I've never seen either of you not by each other's side!" Henry and Jasper were so close that it was impossible to believe that they weren't out together being twins.

"Oh, he's at home getting the rest that you and I should both be having right now!" Jasper said thoughtfully.

"Yeah, I suppose you're right! I'll see you tomorrow!" Emily replied

"Tomorrow it is then!" he said knowingly, giving her a small and discreet wink.

As she briskly wandered home her eyes darted down all the dark alleyways, alert for any signs of movement. She was home in ten minutes and within another five was asleep.

The next day crawled by. It was spent reading and writing letters to her distant family who she had only ever seen once. At ten in the evening, fifteen minutes from when she had to leave, she lay on the bed, leaning against the backboard, inspecting the deep engravings on the ring's shiny polished gold surface.

Catherine Bruton 17/2/2016 7:03 PM

**Comment [7]:** Do we ever find out why she is there? Do we need to?

Catherine Bruton 17/2/2016 6:53 PM

**Comment [8]:** How does she feel about not being able to confide in him?

Catherine Bruton 17/2/2016 7:04 PM

**Comment [9]:** Do we ever find out why she came? I know she lies and says she couldn't sleep so was there a reason for her coming? Perhaps give us a hint - as if they are making a plan. Hint at what might be going to come. And what the ring has to do with it!

Catherine Bruton 17/2/2016 7:04 PM

**Comment [10]:** Consistency. Why is she not so frightened now when it was terrifying earlier?

Catherine Bruton 17/2/2016 7:05 PM

**Comment [11]:** I can see that this is just a fragment of a longer story but I still think you can leave us on an 'end of chapter cliff-hanger' - link the ring, the three characters and give us a hint of what might be going to come!

unwittingly in previous pieces. We would finally learn how the ring ended up in the lost property office in a companion piece to the opening chapter written by a very talented Year 9.

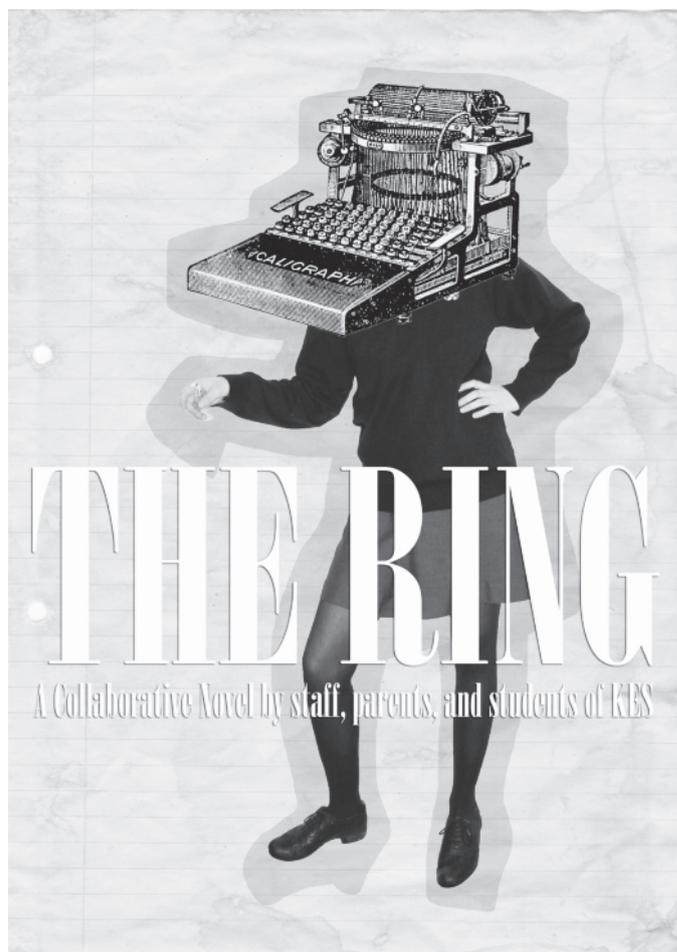
The final chapters were commissioned. A kindly parent agreed to copy-edit the whole thing (lord love her!), one student designed a cover, and another one filmed a promo. We made it into an online format and looked into converting it for Kindle. Now we are exploring self publishing, because *The Ring* deserves to be read. There

is some astonishingly good writing in there, from contributors of all ages. And it works as a whole. It's also a never-ending story, a story that, by its very nature, encourages more story-telling. You can read it, enjoy it, puzzle over it, then add to it - in your own imagination, or put words on the page. If you think you can "join the dots" or "fill in the gaps", then get scribbling - and the story of *The Ring* can grow and grow!

So what did we learn? That collaborative novel writing is terrifying, sometimes dizzyingly hard work, fraught with pitfalls and fails 50% of the time? Yes. But also that even when it falls flat on its face, it helps students learn about their own writing process, and that of others. It creates a genuinely collaborative environment that stays with students, even long after they've left the school; it generates an excitement about writing in a way no other project I've attempted ever has.

But right now I need a cup of tea then a long lie down in a dark room to recover ... and if I ever, ever suggest doing this again, please – somebody, anybody – rugby tackle me to the ground and please, please make me stop!

*Catherine Bruton is an author, journalist and English teacher. She has twenty years experiencing teaching in a variety of schools both in the UK and overseas. She now teaches English part time at King Edward's School, Bath. She writes articles on education, literature and parenting for newspapers and magazines including 'The Times' and 'The Guardian', and is also the author of several novels for children and young adults, including 'We Can be Heroes', which was nominated for the Carnegie Medal and the critically acclaimed 'I Predict A Riot' which was shortlisted for ten major awards. She also writes for younger readers under the name Cate Shearwater.*



# The Boat Is Coming

## Part Three: Adscititious Narratives

Andrew Melrose



In closing Part Two of this article series<sup>1</sup> I wrote that the picturebook maker's job is to help provide a story that allows children to explore experiences and what is new to them in the world. Not as a didactic sermon but enough words and images to allow them to explore the

imaginative realm of storytelling. To give them something that will not stand still, for it will never be new again, but will always be, Penelope-like<sup>2</sup>, starting over, as they come to assimilate what they already know with what they know not. This means creating a text that helps to bring the child reader into a shared experience, mediated by a story. In the case being emphasized in this, the last of three articles, it is a story about those unfortunate enough to be called "Boat People". I firmly believe that our job as writers and artists is to try and let children have access to balanced thinking on some pretty terrible issues and decisions some people have to confront in their everyday lives, while nurturing in them the goodness of storytelling. It's a tricky balance and defies the notion that writing for children is about telling little stories for little kids; rather it's about telling big stories short for young people. Nevertheless, the problems on the issue of what we have called *The Boat* are immediately obvious.

But what are these problems I am referring to? Almost by coincidence, as I sat down to write this piece, two headlines in *The Guardian* caught my eye and they act like bookends propping up and polarising the issues. The first headline read, "Refugee' is children's word of the year, declares Oxford University Press"<sup>3</sup>; the second,

"More than 700 migrants feared dead in three Mediterranean sinkings"<sup>4</sup>. I will refer to both in a little more detail later but the coincidence of the two headlines appearing in the same week, juxtaposing the idea that the migrant crisis in Europe has sparked children's imagination in entries for Radio 2's creative writing competition, "500 Words", with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) saying that "More than 700 people are believed to have drowned in the Mediterranean last week, the deadliest seven days for Europe-bound asylum seekers in more than a year"<sup>5</sup> is pretty significant. The idea of "refugees" and their plight is difficult for children to rationalize and yet clearly they do. The newspaper commentaries and commentators are hard to ignore. "It was pretty gruesome," said Giorgia Linardi, a member of a rescue team from German NGO Sea Watch. "There were already many dead bodies floating in the sea ... We found a little kid of a few months. Most of them were young people – we found a [dead] couple hugging each other..." And yet, while children were entering a creative writing competition, perhaps one that many *Writing in Education* readers helped those children with, and which was designed for fun, they were still able to address the seriousness of these stories for themselves. This quotation is from an (as yet) unknown 12-year-old British girl in her entry to the competition.

*I'm in France ... [a] place called Calais. It turns out that nobody wants us after all. There was no gold at the end of the rainbow. I have no idea when or how I will get away from this prison.*

"It turns out nobody wants us after all..." It's enough to make you weep and while this is just one of many stories that led Oxford University Press to declare

“refugee” as the Children’s Word of the Year, based on their analysis of 123,500 short stories that were entered into the BBC competition, it is extremely powerful and engaged.

What is clear is that children are as capable as the rest of us in seeing the adscitious narratives that lie behind news headlines. Their forays into story writing and fiction also reveal that they are capable of accepting and assimilating bad news with a view to raising awareness. Creative writing is always, to some degree, adscitious. In dealing with this topic, the press and television news cover the surface stories of those named as “refugees” or “migrants” or “immigrants” or “emigrants” or “boat people”. Fiction and poetry allow us to delve below the surface and describe, define, name, narrate and humanize those involved, to reveal these as real stories about real people, with real feelings – about loss and love.

Of course in news stories this is problematic. A migrant may not wish to be named because they are protecting a family left behind. But fictionalizing the accounts of journeys – escape by sea, life on Manus, Lesbos and Lampedusa islands, in Turkey, at Calais – allows a narrative to develop and other stories to be told. These are the stories filled with the ghosts, the histories, the hardships, the successes and failures and the hitherto unspoken silences that accompany the headlines. And for thousands of entries into a children’s short story competition to reveal the word of the year as being “refugee”, means that the stories are getting through. What a heartening and sobering fact for governments across the world to take on board. Indeed, seen in the context of the UK government’s opposition to the introduction of the new A Level in Creative Writing, one might be inclined to speculate on what they are so afraid of – the radicalization of children who want to speak on serious issues, perhaps? But that’s another matter for another time.

In *The Boat* project we have gone some way to deliberately encouraging the adscitious narrative, the hidden critical layers behind the benign surface story. It’s not a new idea; literature has been doing this for centuries, so too drama and poetry. But let me explain how we have recently taken this into schools to research the effect and workings in order to reflect on the teaching and learning and process of knowledge

exchange and engagement.<sup>6</sup> Stephanie Morris deliberately designed *The Boat* to contain anonymous characters. (See figure 1.)

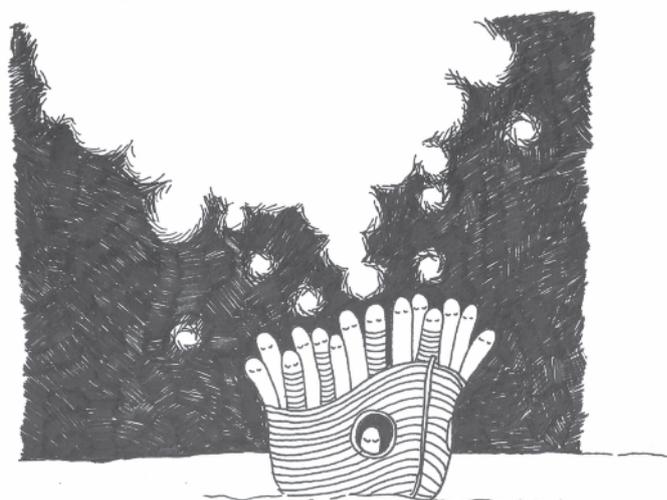


Figure 1

Initially we had been trying to show the facelessness of those known simply as “boat people” with a view to encouraging the underlying real stories of those “refugees” discussed above. Certainly it provoked a great deal of discussion, as it was meant to. But we needed to research this idea further.

With the support of a Teaching and Learning Fellowship from the University of Winchester, some of our Department of Education, Health and Social Care primary student teachers were paired with a selection of Hampshire primary school teachers. Their task was to undertake research and development to inform the story and illustration designs and to help develop learning and teaching resources. It was envisioned that feedback from this stage would be analysed by education expert, Dr Jonathan Rooke at the University of Winchester, to inform the direction *The Boat* story eventually takes. The first four partner schools selected for the research and development phase were Winnall Primary School, Merton Junior School, Four Lanes Community Junior School and The Crescent Primary School. And here is a sample of the resulting work:

### Crescent Primary School

In March 2016, EHSC student teachers, Dom Townsend and Mona Linder, teamed up with classroom teachers, Ali Roberts and Jamie Cannon. Working with Year 6 pupils they made a humanized boat. (See figures 2 and 3.)

Each boat person was given a name and identity with a talking tin underneath. When a button is pressed the person talks; a QR code links to a fact sheet about that person. It was a tremendous and inspired learning activity and we can see here how the developing narrative of “refugees” can actually be introduced to children.

But they also played with the text. The first draft lines we are working with are linked to the Moses story I mentioned in Part 1 of this article series<sup>7</sup>:

1. A mother put her baby in a basket  
and put the basket into the river  
then she watched it sail away
2. The basket bobbed gently on the water  
and the baby stayed safe  
as he sailed to a better life

The children then intervened in the story by addressing a questionnaire designed by our EHSC students. (See figure 4.)

Already the seeds of the adscitious narrative are being sown, there are already questions being asked and issues addressed and indeed the whole process of engaged teaching and learning and knowledge exchange is being brought into focus, through a story. In time it is to be hoped that these Year 6 pupils will be the next 500 Word story entrants.

The entire exercise up to this point has been hugely rewarding for the writer and artist but also extremely informative and invaluable in creating what will become a book, an exhibition, a website (<http://the-immigration-boat-story.com>) and a mobile phone, tablet, computer app. As this short piece reveals, it’s about keeping the story and stories of those refugees alive, even as they are dying in their hundreds crossing the sea. Of course it is only a small picture book at heart, a



Figure 2

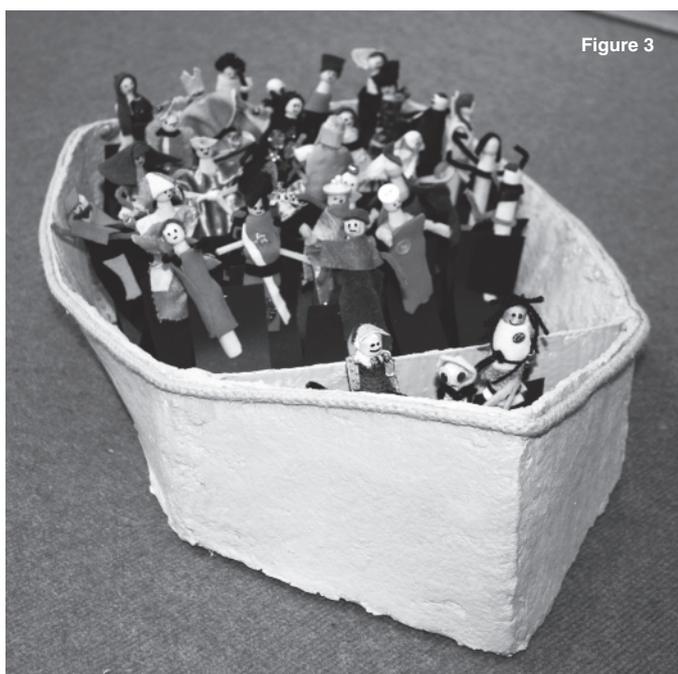


Figure 3

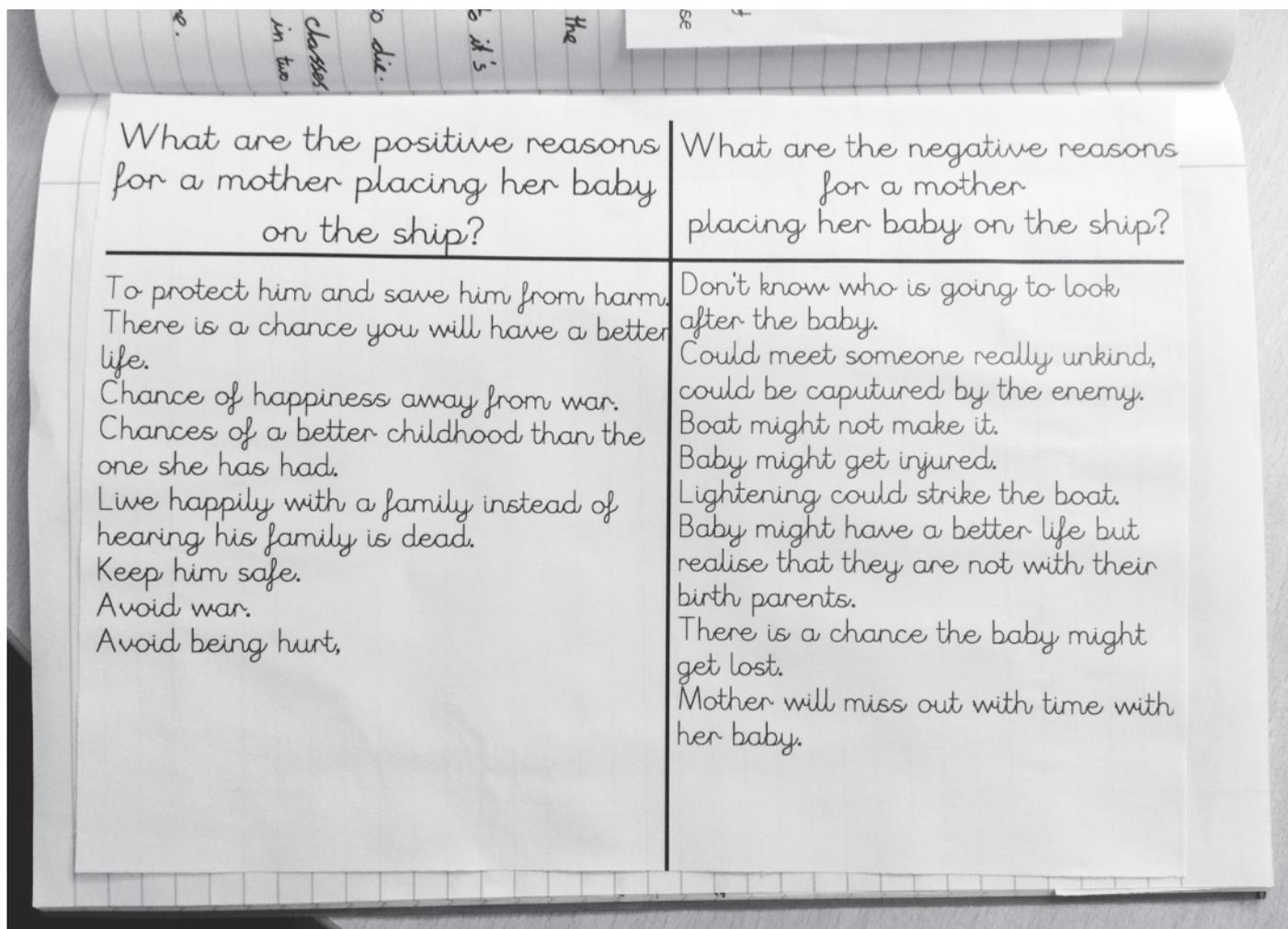


Figure 4

twelve double spread bedtime read, but hopefully it will become integrated into the many other initiatives raising awareness. And indeed, as part of Refugee Week (20–26 June) I gave a lecture at the Discovery Centre in Winchester, not to publicize the book – which is still being made – but to continue raising awareness and telling the story.

What began as a small story called *The Boat* transmogrified into an educational tool (as the story was still being written and illustrated), while at the same time being researched so that it could be disseminated to a wider audience. Even in writing for children, there is an ongoing attention to the artistic process, which engages, retraces, absorbs and redefines a notion of art as well as the delivery of knowledge as a reflexive outcome. *The Boat* is a creative project, for children and their parents and schools, about things happening with

refugees all over the world, who take to boats in search of a better life (thousands of years after Moses was put into a basket by his mother, in the hope he would have a better life – or even a life at all). But as we can see, art is not created in a bubble, it is created in the busy, noisy environment of living.

#### Notes

1. *Writing in Education* 68, Spring 2016, p.62
2. 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.

3. <http://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2016/may/26/refugee-is-childrens-word-of-the-year> accessed 26/05/2016

4. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/29/700-migrants-feared-dead-mediterranean-says-un-refugees> accessed 29/05/2016

5. Ibid

6. The University of Winchester gave me and my colleague, Dr Jonathan Rooke, a Learning and Teaching Fellowship to conduct this research

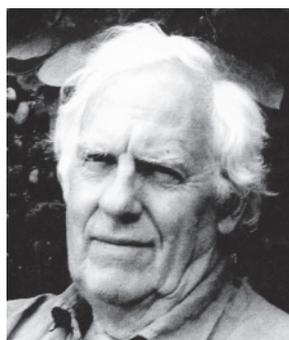
7. *Writing in Education* 67, Autumn 2015, p.19

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*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.*

# Testing times for schoolchildren

Robert Hull



## A KS1 reading test

When Robert Louis Stevenson launched his children's poem "Where go the boats?" on the stream of public interest, he could hardly have foreseen it being washed up on the barren shores of comprehension testing. But

here it is, the poem as a voice to be heard, an experience to be made available to children, supplanted in this sample test by its re-deployment as a means of eliciting a "reading score" from junior school children.

The Standards and Testing Agency's "Key stage 1 English reading – Sample questions, mark schemes and commentary for 2016"<sup>1</sup> may well cheer a few teachers – from the merely diffident to the discreetly poemophobic – in whom the thought of poetry induces apprehension and doubt. But, as a euphonium with a bunch of flowers in its bell becomes an honorary vase, its career as euphonium suspended, the poem's status as poem lapses here, where it is treated purely as comprehension test fodder. And this form of test is how, the document makes clear, the "new national curriculum will be assessed for the first time in May 2016". Its treatment of the poem inevitably becomes the model for its treatment in the classroom in preparation for the test.

Seven of the eight questions are in multiple choice form, in which children choose from four pre-written answers. Throughout the test, in "writing" their answers, children write nothing of their own. Instead they spend time negotiating with "answers" that are often devoid of plausibility. They are not invited to say anything about the poem. Rather, they're invited to say nothing. And on the basis of no one child's saying anything of their own

about a poem, a "reading score" for each child is devised. This too, is a model for classroom use.

The fact that four of the eight questions are not well asked is almost beside the point; even so, it's worth noting how, for instance, two questions invoke "the poet" as if he performed actions in the poem, when the "I" of the poem, who launches his or her boats on a stream, is a child, as one infers from the fact that "other children" collect them downstream. The question "Who does the poet think will find his boats?" tests grasp of "Content Domain 1 C 4", which stresses that children need to be able to "Explain key aspects of fiction and non-fiction texts such as characters, events and information". Children need to be able to, but not the questioner. The pointlessness of such questioning could hardly be better illustrated.

Much teaching time will be spent in anxious preparation for a test which effaces the poem-as-poem and elicits no writing or speech from the children doing it. Whatever time they spend on poetry will be spent answering sterile comprehension questions. Children will not be reading and experiencing poems as poems.

## Test rehearsal

Practice for tests all too often replaces the normal school day. In England many thousands of children aged 11 will be experiencing school days like those my granddaughter has experienced over several weeks' practice for Sats, days devoted almost exclusively to maths and "English" practice, with PE, music, art, the humanities and the rest put to one side. And "English" does not, for her class, include, and hasn't for some while included any kind of extended writing.

I was given an equally telling glimpse into the structuring of this stifling world from another angle

recently, when I was approached for permission (not given) to use a poem of mine in a new textbook – an “English Advanced Revision workbook”, which, the emailed brief suggested, would “provide brilliantly smart support to Year 6 learners practicing (sic) for the National Curriculum tests [...] Guided practice questions on every page demonstrate good technique and build confidence. Loads of practice questions in the style of the new exams...”<sup>2</sup> – and so on, in a vein too near settled cynicism for comfort.

Add to the time given to “loads of practice questions” the time devoted to wrestling with grammatical concepts (the tests being on one level the product of a fashionable but intellectually vacuous grammatical fundamentalism) – concepts like “cohesion” and “fronted adverbial” which might come in handy at university, though probably not, it’s hardly surprising that thousands of parents protested recently against the new tests for 6- and 7-year-olds by withdrawing their children from school for a day. This, though they were aware that Ms Morgan wants “British pupils to become more competitive internationally” – that is, do better with the Pisa scores.

The effect in schooling of such activity is to displace normal teaching to make room for a kind of pre-curriculum consisting mainly (as in 11-plus tutoring) of rehearsals for tests. Much “English” teaching at junior school level, therefore, mimics, in anticipation of Sats, the fragmented, ersatz “curriculum” of commercial booklets for English skills – with Comprehension, Spelling, Punctuation, Parts of Speech, Poetry, Figurative Language and so on done into separate booklets: separate “subjects”, in fact.

For 7- and 8-year-olds, time that would have been available for writing is spent on worksheets with 20 questions on antonyms, 20 on syllables (how any syllables in...?), 20 on phonemes, and so on; then questions on “choosing adjectives”, “identifying verbs”, and “changing tenses”. The sacrifice of a creative, integrated narrative of reading and writing to test preparation is not only tragic in itself for all children; a further outcome is that for children who do not bring a rich language experience from home to help them survive so desiccated an “English”, learning through English properly speaking is at a standstill. Under this oppressive regime, then, how much – or

little – time children spend on extended writing depends on how much is available once the urgencies of testing and test preparation are catered for. My current experience as a volunteer reader with Year 7 students unambiguously suggests that too many boys and girls have done little extended writing in Year 6. And here in at secondary school, there is “no time”, I was told, “for writing poems in English... because of the curriculum”.

The retreat of teaching before test rehearsal – and “curriculum” – is not a purely English phenomenon. Sir Ken Robinson, in his *Creative Schools* (2016: 158) quotes a teacher in an American school – the standardized testing “addiction” is global, he points out – who loses six days’ teaching over two weeks to the 5th grade Achievement test, and another month’s class time, at least, in preparation for it. Robinson’s view is that the amount of “time lost in other schools is far greater”.<sup>3</sup>

### Schools and happy

The situation is all the more worrying, in that English schoolchildren are more frequently tested – formally at ages 5, 7, 11, 16 and 17, and informally in preparation for those tests – than almost any in the developed world. The stresses experienced by their children in the face of further projected testing were what made thousands of parents withdraw them from a day’s schooling, in protest.

But the cult of testing affects teachers too. Discussion of an OECD report, “Improving School Leadership”, in *The Daily Telegraph* of 10/3/2015, noted that the testing regime and the testing culture it generates, allied to Ofsted inspections, which in the words of the OECD report’s author, Beatriz Pont, “turn schools upside down”, create a focus on external accountability, whereas heads “should be able”, she pointedly observes, “to focus more on pupils”. They should “take their own evaluations in hand [...] and [be] given support to achieve that autonomy”.<sup>4</sup>

The focus was firmly on pupils in a recent study by the Children’s Society, reported in *The Guardian* on 19/08/2015<sup>5</sup>, of the well-being and happiness of schoolchildren. The study found that English schoolchildren are less happy at school than children in at least 11 other countries of the 14 in the study, those other countries including Eritrea and Algeria. One of the

reasons that mothers recently withdrew their children from school for a day was to do with children's perceived "stress".

Given those perspectives, it is legitimate to ask: how much might the stress and pressure of a focus on testing and teaching towards tests contribute to this sad picture of English schoolchildren's school experience? One might also ask how much "the increasing tendency to test", in Beatriz Pont's words, contributes, in terms of its oppressive tensions, to a bleak experience for many teachers. For it seems that English schoolteachers are scrutinized, monitored, evaluated, and scored as assiduously as their pupils.

As unhappy, often, as their pupils, it seems, English schoolteachers are leaving the profession in droves; four out of ten leave within a year of qualifying, according to government figures reported in *The Guardian* on 31/3/2015, with 4,000 taking their leave every month, and trainee teachers either abandoning their training or not taking up teaching.

In the social world of the classroom, pressure and stress are contagious. Teachers' stress conveys itself to their pupils. The relation between over-tested learners and over-monitored teachers is quasi-symbiotic; teachers themselves spend a significant proportion of their work-time (30% was suggested to me by one mature teacher) on administrative matters such as the scoring and recording of data. Testing, teaching towards tests, scoring and recording are evidently not only taking up space that learning might occupy, but polluting the social atmosphere of classrooms. In the Children's Society study, England ranks 14th out of 15 countries for quality of relationships between children and teachers.

And of course, all this testing, measuring and scoring leads to the "name and shame" culture, the OECD report observes, of league tables, which, the report also suggests, "impact negatively on poorer-performing schools" and "favour schools that are already advantaged".

### The failing 11-plus

Testing is the expression of an educational faith, that it is the only "fair" means of "objectively" discerning ability. The "objectivity" of testing lies in the fact that it is seen

as a matter of measurement, rather than of crude forecasting. So in many schools, for example, test scores are used to place children "fairly" in sets.

The 11-plus still – decades after many authorities abandoned it as unhelpful and unfair – exercises enormous influence in English life. Some 150 authorities in England, as well as groups of schools permitted to select percentages of children by "ability", deploy 11-plus tests to sort children into grammar and non-grammar categories.

There is, of course, a strong social objection to the 11-plus, which is, simply, that going through it can be traumatic for whole families – not just doing the 11-plus exam, which lasts an hour or two, and is for children, but enduring the 11-plus family experience, which lasts for months, with consequences that are likely to be, for the children, for life.

By a kind of politico-social inertia, the 11-plus persists, but it could hardly begin life now, as a new nation-wide panacea, because the democratically inclusive temper of the times would be against the manifest unpleasantness of a this-way or that-way final judgement on a 10-year-old's educational future.

The real case against the 11-plus and all such testing, though, is straightforwardly intellectual. Such tests are damned by the hubris of their defining assumptions. That each test of "verbal reasoning", for example, points to some constant capacity in the child, entails assuming that testers can legitimately extrapolate from one set of responses to one set of questions on one particular day, some unitary and constant capacity which will survive all change and be continuously observable in further test and learning situations.

Each different verbal reasoning test has different questions, which call for different answers. A performance in response to Verbal Reasoning Test A need not draw on the same reasonings as those drawn on to perform Verbal Reasoning Test B. The results of the two Verbal Reasoning tests don't point to one general ability but to, first, the ability to do Test A, and second, the ability to do Test B. Any "information" derived from the one result that goes beyond that single result is inference or prediction. What no one result can do is "measure", as the word is used in, say, the medical

measuring of blood pressure.

So, it is not just that context affects a test score but that the test itself is context. The unitary capacity assumed to be revealed by each version of the verbal reasoning test is illusory. The uncomfortable but established common-sense truth that success at one age or level in education is, unsurprisingly, no guarantor of success at other level later, ought to be enough to bring 11-plus-type testing into disrepute.

### Reading by numbers

Despite such objections, the belief that tests of capacity illuminate – as nothing else does – is pervasive in schooling. Scores routinely displace professional acumen and experience. In a revealing moment in the TV programme *Educating Cardiff*, broadcast on 22 September 2015, a boy has to score 95% in a 10 minute test to qualify to go to a higher set. The implication would seem to be that the boy's teacher is, qua teacher, insufficiently acquainted with the boy's abilities to make a decision; some appeal to higher "objective" authority is necessary to validate the move. When scores supplant judgement, the teacher is reduced to recording data.

Scores are privileged because they sound objectively, inescapably evidential, while professional judgement in words is subjective and disputable. A discourse of scores is superior to, and in practice more powerful than, a discourse of words. One can compare and rank scores, but not so easily conversations. Mr Gove's infatuation with Chinese teaching was evidently brought on by a few tantalizing flashes of score.

The literacy or reading score – gathered from tests – is one of the essential points of educational reference not just for politicians keen to identify "high-performing jurisdictions", but also now for schools. The "reading age", so called, is basic to discussing children's reading and progress, and is widely used to place children in sets, as when they enter secondary school.

Popular reading programmes like "Accelerated Reader", which many school libraries have taken on, deploy a language of numbers more generally – not just in the form of reading scores certifying "ages" or "levels" of reading attainment, but numbers as labels (figuratively and literally) for levels of books deemed appropriate for

this or that reading age, and in the form of the number of books read and also words read over a defined period of time, seen as an "objective" measures of achievement.

Professional immersion in a discourse of reading scores and numbers means that a more language-oriented, common-sense discourse is less practised, less valued, and less able to determine school policy. Any informal, un-scored consideration of children's reading habits and behaviour – what books are read, and how, and when, and with what kind of motivation or level of satisfaction – is less foregrounded and much less influential. The crucially valuable talk of teacher and librarian about books is supplanted by the urgencies of "objective" scoring.

### Surveillance

The political cultivation of comparative scores requires intense surveillance of the teaching that produces them. It has become the primary educational mission of politics. If teachers are feeling less valued than they once were, if young teachers are leaving the profession in large numbers, it has much to do with politicians' practised indifference, as it seems, to the living classroom. Pisa league tables, rather, take up the foreground of their attention.

In politics we see, rather than useful aspiration towards awareness of the purposeful life of the classroom and of teaching, a dysfunctional preoccupation with the role of monitoring and surveillance, both by outsiders and – often fatally to professional community – by colleagues, the latter a practice which further undermines that minimal quantum of trust, confidence and autonomy without which no teacher can teach. The head who tours the corridors asking children whether they understood the lesson just taught them by Mr X or Miss Y is doing no more than helping to corrode professional trust. The activity has become possible only because the classroom is now – in political eyes – a press for delivering the juice of grades.

I've seen from close-up the devastating effects – on good teachers – of what Simon Jenkins called, in a *Guardian* piece (11 December 2014)<sup>6</sup>, Ofsted's "regulatory terrorism" – as when it descends out of the blue to harvest several minutes' clip-board notes presumed to equate with illumination. Set alongside the empathizing

and perceptive judgements that Her Majesty's Inspectorate delivered only a decade or two ago, such surveillance appears destructive.

A recent editorial on teacher recruitment – "Teacher Shortage Risks Our Children's Futures" – in *The Observer* (30/08/15), had important things to say about teaching: such as that in Finland "There are 10 applicants for every teacher-training place". Nick Gibb, the schools minister who "has denied there is an issue with recruitment", might muse on Finland's recruitment problem.

The leader also stresses the need for a "high-stakes accountability system". But "accountability", in its current intrusive implementation, only adds its own destructive push to the retreat from teaching. Any student with a sharp mind will think at least twice before risking the humiliations now routinely visited even on fine, committed teachers. Students who see what's going on are likely to clear off, and seem to be doing so – the more especially, if they want to encourage children to read and write, not just scratch in the sand for succulent concession clauses.

### At Happy School

Mid-way through his book *Happy City* (2013), Charles Montgomery observes that "trust, feelings of belonging, social time and happiness are like balloons tied together in a bouquet". *Happy City* is a study of city life not school life, but a great deal of what he says about the levels of happiness and sense of well-being amongst city-dwellers could be said about schools and the life of classrooms.

In Montgomery's perspective, trust and a sense of belonging are fundamental to feelings of well-being. If teachers feel they are not trusted and can only earn, through surviving mauling by monitoring, a meagre sense of belonging professionally, that experience would be no part of "Happy School". And if children are pressurized through relentless testing, and then also feel the contagion of their teachers' unease, that will hardly be part of a "Happy School" experience either.

The tied-in "balloons" of Montgomery's "bouquet", that focus on the crucial nature of a nexus of daily experiences, reminds us that the classroom is not a

simple grades press, but a complex social place, where, in a space devoted to learning, relationships between teachers and children, and between children and their classmates, flourish (or not) as a necessary environment for their educational growth, as it does also for their teachers' sense of professional well-being.

Children will write a great deal more in classrooms not devoted to testing and rehearsing for tests. That writing will be felt as its own validation, as indeed writing is. In writing children can be themselves, say seriously who and what they are. They will learn to write as they write and through what they write. They will learn that writing is an expression of, or rather a way of being. They won't get that from having to find another 20 pairs of antonyms.

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*Robert Hull was a classroom teacher for some 30 years, and worked as a writer in schools from the early 90s.*

# The Inner Playground

## Stimulating adults' creativity through writing

Kate Pawsey



*In this paper I present different ways of approaching play as an active stimulant to creativity, and to creative writing specifically. Set in the context of facilitated sessions of creative, expressive and reflective writing for therapeutic purposes, I draw out threads from my recent MSc dissertation and illustrate the article with pieces written by the volunteer participants. The title*

*of the study was "An investigation into what happens when I, as a facilitator of Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes (CWTP), conduct a single research session entitled 'Exploring Play Through Creative Writing' with adults in Britain".*

*This paper presents contrasting ways of approaching the use of play as an active stimulant in facilitated sessions of creative, expressive and reflective writing. One is more direct than the other; each has its merits and risks.*

I facilitate adult groups and one-to-one sessions of creative writing for therapeutic purposes (CWTP) and use the word facilitate in preference to the word teach. I am not alone in seeing a link between creativity and play. Lyn Gardener's article in *The Guardian* (2016) is an account of the April 2016 symposium and exhibition called *Playing Up*, hosted by Tate Modern. The account of the event links play, art and creativity, children and adults, stating: "Even the title is a provocation, offering a framework for behaving badly and breaking established rules. Which is what live artists do all the time." "The event" Gardner continues, "certainly provides the permission needed for adults to get playing

and exploring their inner child."

I believe that something which, ideally, we had free access to as children – exploration and self-expression through play and experiment, building and enjoying developing our skills – can be engendered, encouraged, supported and stimulated, throughout our lives. Maybe this is teaching creativity. I see it more as nurturing something that is latent to a greater and lesser degree in each of us, depending on our life experiences.

My belief was strengthened through conducting my MSc research, which formed the final year of my vocational training to become a practitioner of CWTP, delivered by the psychotherapy training organization, Metanoia Institute. I was interested to follow a hunch that CWTP could provide an arena for inviting people into a state of creative flow akin to the play state that was our birthright as children, and which is known to be vital for all aspects of growth and development throughout childhood; research spearheaded over recent decades by US National Institute of Play founder, Stuart Brown (2008), shows this to be also relevant throughout adulthood.

The late play theorist Brian Sutton-Smith said "the opposite of play isn't work. It's depression." (Estroff Marano 1999: –). This is much quoted in the serious world of play. I wondered if the arena of CWTP could provide something to promote emotional connection to that *jouissance*, energy and freedom associated with play – through creative, expressive and reflective writing within a facilitated, structured framework.

I had been told by a UK play therapist that the play state is the natural state of the child and that things happen to

children, either gradually or traumatically, to cause them to become frozen, stuck or shut down. Sexual, physical or emotional abuse, or neglect can cause such things, causing play-deprivation and the attendant lack of developmental opportunity.

My regular sessions are nothing as edgy or played out as the Playing Up event, quite the opposite in fact; the bulk of the action is experienced in our private writing – our inner playgrounds – which is shared, if wished, as much as any individual feels comfortable in so doing. I often find myself inviting people to experiment, however, to explore and follow their curiosity, to play with possibilities, perceptions, approaches and perspectives. I find the effects to be powerful. Exercises are consciously contrived, but I witness that in such circumstances creative outcomes are not only possible but are at best organic, therapeutic, transformational and life-shifting.

Something that began to form in my mind, while I was training on the CWTP certificate and diploma, was how rarely I felt at ease or liberty as an adult to express my most playful side, out loud. My partner and I had moved twice from my long-term base in West Wales. New acquaintances could find me a bit much in my playful mode. I was struck by the fact that, although I rarely drink (I tend to become overexcited for about ten minutes, then fall asleep) I *could* keep up with the uninhibited antics of other people while they drank, without touching a drop myself. What was considered acceptable, uninhibited behaviour after a few drinks was what, apparently, I had access to freely when I was in *encouraged, approved of* playful mode.

Otherwise my writing was the place that was most safe for me to express this. It was *my* inner playground. This led me to deliver a short presentation at the Arts in Health South West conference in 2014 entitled *CWTP: an opportunity for adults to play while remaining sober and fully clothed*.

### Approach to the research

As my study was to be gently pioneering – a “what happens when” approach – I decided to employ Grounded Theory and conduct it as a phenomenological inquiry; I was looking at the *experience* of individuals taking part in a play-focused CWTP session. This experience would include that of my volunteer

participants, and, to a degree, my own. This approach, which was breaking new ground, necessitated identifying in advance any possible risks involved and making adequate provision for them, such as considering any relevant safety implications and appropriate interventions. I intended the study to be small-scale, qualitative, reflective and reflexive, employing thematic analysis of the creative writing produced during the session, and an evaluation feedback questionnaire for participating volunteers.

Originally I had planned, as an inexperienced CWTP trainee, to involve experienced CWTP practitioners as co-researchers. It quickly became evident though that the degree of detail and sensitivity that my envisaged plan required was not going to be easily or adequately met. This realization came *after* I had submitted my first research proposal and received the go-ahead. Luckily for me though, since finishing my diploma in July 2014, I had launched my own private CWTP practice called *Writing Time*, and had, by January 2015, successfully delivered half a dozen taster sessions and a full eight-week series to a group of nine people. To my amazement, once the first series ended, seven out of the nine group members signed up again for a second eight-week series. I then re-thought, and re-submitted my research proposal. I received the go-ahead very quickly with a couple of additional conditions to cover the fact that I was acting in the dual role of researcher *and* facilitator. This involved recording the session and making a transcript, and inviting a professional witness to sit in on the research session. I invited volunteers from my *Writing Time* group to take part in the research session and began preparations for the single three-hour research session entitled *Exploring Play through Creative Writing*. I delivered this session to five participants on 28 March 2015. My research therefore was completely practice-based – a combination which proved very beneficial for me professionally, for the quality of the research and the quality of my practice.

### Method

Having invited my group members to apply to volunteer to attend a free, three-hour session, I created a time slot immediately after our regular *Writing Time* sessions leading up to the research session, where I presented advance information about the research. I invited questions, discussion and clarification around

the research. This included gaining individual permissions to use material produced in the research session, and the booking procedure.

The research session followed the standard pattern I use as a holding vessel for all my CWTP sessions, making deliberate use of the functional parts of the session – welcome, introduction, safety alliance, opening round, warm-up and then two main exercises (with a coffee break between these two), closing round and finish. The themed material had been carefully considered and discussed at length with my supervisor. I introduced the professional witness, who was then seated out of the sight-line of the participants. I offered a very basic warm-up exercise, asking participants to jot down firstly what they understood subjectively by the verb “to play”, and then by the word “playfulness”. The three specifically chosen poems for the first main exercise were “The Railway Children” by Seamus Heaney (1988), “No Ball Games” by Sophie Hannah (2015) and “Skipping without Ropes” by Jack Mapanje (2004).

The exercise chosen for part two of the research session was one I had offered other CWTP groups but never in such a long session, nor to so well-established a group, allowing us to enter the process deeply. The exercise involved inviting participants to recall a recent example of whole-body play or hand-and-object play (i.e. playing with a ball, or clay or some other object), witnessed or experienced by them. They would then write about it, noting the qualities of this example of play, being warned of an ensuing plenary share. They would then be invited to write about how the writing and sharing to this prompt had made them feel, and share again in plenary, before a closing round.

My choice of stimulating material was filtered through who I am, my life experience, my experience of CWTP and of this particular group. I had no sure-fire way of knowing where the poems might land with them. I knew that I was not aiming for them to revert to child ego states but rather to invite them to connect with the qualities and spirit of play, as adults. My supervisor encouraged me to keep the level of stimulus simple and safe. I voiced a concern that my exercises might be *too* tame or unstimulating. She pointed out that my participants would be fresh to the subject, whereas I was already well immersed and thereby acclimatized. This was helpful in finding the right balance between

adventure and safety. I resisted suggestions from my play-therapy consultant to introduce an actual sand-tray, water-tub, ball, or clay, at this stage. I would keep the emphasis on an *imagined* and / or *remembered* connection to play, based on a central principle of CWTP, that writers can conjure things, events and feelings, apparently out of thin air.

I recorded the whole session and gave out evaluation forms to be completed and returned to me within a set time. I made arrangements with the participant I refer to in her chosen name – Ruby. She was the sole participant who decided to take up my offer of a follow-up correspondence about her experience of the research session, offered for the following month. I wrote reflectively throughout the preparation and follow-up to the research session and engaged in a reflexive correspondence with Christine Hollywood, then chair of Lapidus and our professional witness.

There is not scope to give a complete account of what happened in the research session here. This is available on my website and includes, in the appendices, all the creative, expressive and reflective writing produced in the session, full thematic analysis of two participants’ creative writing and the results of all participants’ evaluation and feedback. It showcases Ruby’s participation in particular, illustrating her experience through her ongoing reflective correspondence following the research session.

### What was revealed

During the research session, I was already noticing some emerging themes, grounded in the experience of the research session and the written and spoken material produced during it. These themes became clearer to me during further reflection, from conducting the thematic analysis of participants’ creative and reflective writing, examining their evaluative feedback, and from considering the correspondence both with Ruby and Christine Hollywood. Two stark themes emerged clearly from the creative material and the written and verbal reflection: appreciation of and connection to the sheer joy of play, and sadness at its absence in adult life.



### Flying (AC)

Growing up in London,  
 'Don't talk to strangers, don't go far'.  
 Limitations which I didn't understand.  
 I didn't think these things were worth knowing.

But flying was worth knowing,  
 Sailing on my bike in Mayow Park.  
 Excitement fizzing in my chest like a shaken can of lemonade.  
 Little bugs hitting my face, sacrificing their lives for my pleasure.

The smell of grass almost suffocating me at speed.  
 My legs powering the wheels so that I could take off.  
 Literally flying from the restrictions of my parents' fear.  
 I was fearless in my flight.  
 The runway was in Mayow Park.

### Fearless (AC)

Imagine you can be whatever, whoever, wherever you want.  
 What, who, where would you be?  
 I would be fearless – not afraid to experiment, get things wrong, look silly.  
 When did I forget how to do all of these things?

Playing and laughing and attempting and seeking fun – fun in everything.  
 Getting a grazed knee, crying and getting up again.  
 Trying again – not caring to keep the other knee safe.  
 Fearless and free.

This echoed my previous findings where a participant had said "I mourn the loss of play."

More explicitly, the sessions elicited in Ruby strong feelings around not having played freely as a child, owing to her mother's mental illness. In her feedback to me after the research session Ruby wrote:

*When I think of my childhood, I don't have a sense of freedom, space, growing, exploring, excitement. I feel constrained, controlled, dark, isolated, less than. The session was hard because it brought me face to face with those feelings.*

*Listening to other people's happy memories made me feel the loss even deeper. I feel a very deep sense of loss and anger that my childhood and my innocence was taken. This happened because of my mother's mental health issues and ongoing childhood abuse from a family member.*

A third theme was an appreciation of play as both an indicator and a tool for bonding and building trust. This was reflected in an account of the relationship with an adopted daughter, and also with a once-feral cat who had lost trust of his owner after acute illness required many visits to the vet.

Then (HP)

*Bucket and Spade*

*How unprepared I was after the Preparation course*

*For our first family holiday I bought the bucket and spade  
You didn't enjoy your first encounter  
with sand;  
didn't understand what was expected of you*

*All children like the seaside  
Don't they?*

Now (HP)

*Now look how far we've come*

*You gave me a conspiratorial smile when we packed  
the bucket and spade  
the frisby, the bat and ball  
Our joys met*

*Nothing prepared me for you being you  
I am still preparing,*

*still learning  
not to make you wear culottes or woolly tights  
but to watch your bare legs run free on the sands*

*Playing with Theo*

*My annoyance dissipates quickly  
How can I be cross when he's so eager?  
Theo loves his morning routine –  
breakfast first, then grooming, then playtime  
(although he's no kitten, now)*

*Sometimes we play with the ping pong ball  
I gently let it drop across the table  
Tap tap tap tap with each light bounce  
He leaps  
The ball ricochets from his paw, scuttles under the sofa  
and he launches into the kill  
The ball rolls against a sofa leg, changes direction,  
He pounces*

*The string game is however, Theo's favourite  
It has to be more of a thick cord rather than string  
He ate a string once,  
the consequences were unmentionable.....*

A fourth theme was one for which I was heartily glad to have made provision and preparation in advance. Ruby connected with the fact that she had been sexually abused by a family member in childhood. This manifested in her writing about watching a girl, a stranger, continuously and strenuously washing her hands, for far too long, before going on stage and performing apparently confidently alongside Ruby's elder daughter. Ruby had been fairly reticent throughout the session, voicing tentatively that she felt she had not been able to write "correctly" in response to the creative writing exercises offered, so chose not to read out her writing, just describe it. Towards the close of the session, however, she came forward a little, and was encouraged to share what had been going on for her. She did read out all her pieces, and shared tentatively what she had been experiencing.

*Hands – part one (Ruby)*

*She stood at the sink  
and washed her hands  
and washed them again  
and again.*

*What invisible stain was she trying to  
scrub away?*

*I saw her next  
under the spotlight.  
The contrast struck  
and moved me.*

*She stood  
alone,  
in front of the crowd,  
speaking her words  
with head held high.*

*Her bravery  
and courage  
lit up the dark.*

*Hands – part two (Ruby)*

*In my mind,  
I carefully  
fill a sink  
with warm,  
lavender-scented bubbles.*

*I take her hands  
gently in mine  
and wash them  
with my own.  
I smooth them dry  
with a soft,  
sweet smelling  
towel.*

*I hold her hands  
for a while  
in my own.*

In the closing round, four out of the five participants expressed heart-felt appreciation of the experience, and enthusiasm for exploring opportunities for more play, as

adults. Two participants used the word “saturated” to describe how they felt. Ruby voiced that she knew that she had to process her experience, and didn’t really know what to say. It became clear that she was holding in a lot of strong emotions, which we debriefed a little, privately, immediately after the session. We arranged to stay in touch and had a deep but spacious email exchange over the following month. I was glad to have built in safeguards, including offering the cost of a counselling or therapy session if required.

**Conclusions**

I deduced that there could be two principle ways of approaching play in the context of CWTP sessions. The first is to do as I did in the research session, with a group in which cohesion exists between the group members and a trust has grown for the facilitator and their approach, culture, exercises and presence, through an ongoing series of sessions. The risk here is that such an approach, where I invited participants to engage directly in their relationship with play through the exercises and prompts I offered, can expose historical abuse – sexual, emotional, psychological, or otherwise – as it did with Ruby. I was fully aware of this possibility and so put in place the relevant contingencies described (see “method”, above). Under advice from my supervisor, I deliberately approached the subject of play obliquely and in a light-touch, almost indirect way, inviting consideration of our relationship with play through the writing exercises, rather than promoting a confrontation with participants’ relationship with play, through play itself. Participants were invited to remember some observed or experienced examples of play. I did not give them a hula hoop or a sand tray and say “now play, then write about it”. This felt to me too direct, too imposing, too unprepared and, above all, patronizing. It was never my intention to revert participants to their child ego states. The invitation was for the adults in the room to explore play through responding to questions, exercises and prompts which stimulated this, without confronting them too brutally with their relationship with play. Nobody knows another’s relationship with play. I did not know theirs. And neither, it turns out, did they.

Additional safety features were: payment for a counselling or therapy session if something that happened in the research session re-triggered trauma,

and discomfort was greater than I was equipped to support; providing sign-posting to relevant organizations if required; and making myself available for supportive contact during the month following the research session. This took place, with Ruby, via email, which was her chosen medium.

Imaginative play, narrative play, story-telling and transformative play were evidently at work in the room. Add to this the holding provided by both facilitator and group, and there was attunement present. I invited participants to specifically recall whole-body play and hand-and-object play, and both of these had been gently stimulated in the physical and verbal warm-ups at the start of the session. Feedback offered by my professional witness was that we all have the choice about what we write about, whatever the stimulus, and that Ruby, consciously or otherwise, grasped the opportunity to begin to examine her childhood traumas.

A contrasting conclusion is that my approach, as just described, was too direct. Play, like therapy perhaps, is a subtle phenomenon, requiring an even more subtle approach. We do not necessarily need to name play in a CWTP session for it to be present. To confront a participant with their disrupted relationship with play, even if done relatively obliquely, as in my research session, could, in other circumstance, have precipitated further trauma to any given participant, and a loss of their trust in the therapeutic process.

Another approach, therefore, based on the findings of my study, is to include play in an even more subtle way, as an inherent part of CWTP. To do otherwise carries the possibility, without adequate time, experience and skill on the part of the facilitator, to set someone back in their healing journey, through triggering trauma and thereby compounding the original experience of an enforced, non-consensual activity. My thesis provides a story that highlights the delicacy and fragility of the therapeutic tightrope that I walked with Ruby. Happily, the amount of input necessary to satisfy a masters research proposal was enough to achieve a positive and beneficial outcome for all who took part in the research, including myself and Ruby.

I am confirmed in my belief that CWTP is a natural and ideal setting for adults to express themselves playfully and to explore play in a “safe enough” arena, in their

own time and way. Winnicott talks about the value of being a good enough mother – not perfect in every way, but doing the best she can with what is available at the time (1953). In my training we talked about safe enough holding – the best one can provide in the circumstances without protecting the participant from their own process. Being held by a facilitator and in the relatively safe, un-critical culture engendered in the session, adult participants do have access to imaginative and narrative play. They can even access the emotional connection of remembered or imagined physical or hand-and-object play through their creative, expressive and reflective writing, even if we, the facilitators, do not expressly name it as play. CWTP sessions provide an opportunity to enter an inner playground while writing silently alongside others. I have come to think of this play state as flow, in the Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi sense:

*a theory of optimal experience based on the concept of flow - the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it...for the sheer sake of doing it. (1991: 4).*

Approaching it in such adult terms side-steps some of the risks in cornering someone with a disrupted sexual or play history, without barring them from the beneficial outcomes of playing, in this context. Awareness of the potency of play, as an act, a realm, a mode or a spirit, on the part of the facilitator or teacher, would influence the session content and culture, and the consideration of safeguards they could weave into the session framework.

A playground for the imagination can of course be accessed alone. The experience can, however, be greatly enhanced by what I describe here, in a group which is led / taught / mentored / inspired by a well-prepared, safe-enough “other”. Such a person can enable participants to explore, experiment and follow their creativity and balance risk-taking with self-care. Feedback from the volunteers who took part in my research reflected an appetite for new, external experiences – the embodiment, I believe, of play and playfulness – as well as fuel for further inner adventures, through continuing to develop their creative writing outside of the session.

I am keen to conduct further, quantitative research,

employing questionnaires for CWTP practitioners delivering sessions in a wide variety of contexts and settings. I am in discussions with a colleague, who loves number-crunching (which I don't), with a view to some collaborative research in the future. I would welcome feedback and input from those of you who already use an approach in tune with, or complementary to, the ideas introduced here.

In this respect I intend to allow play to continue to stimulate me creatively both professionally and personally in the terms I have adopted.

*For me play is a spirit, as much as a thing that we do. It is a spirit which encourages us to explore, to experiment, to follow our curiosity.* (Phillips 2014).

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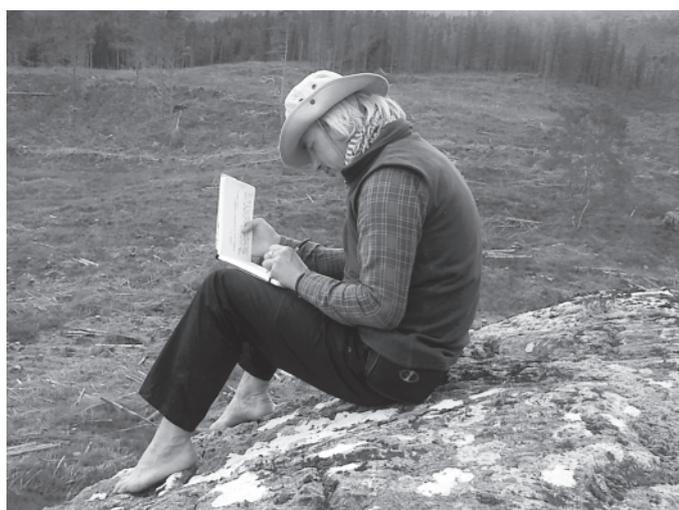
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# Wild writing and free-range teaching

Kevan Manwaring



Imagine turning up to a lesson with no notes, no lesson plan, no “learning outcomes” – just your years of experience, skills and writer’s imagination. By adopting a more fluid, sensitized, reciprocal approach, akin to what Philip Gross describes as “the discipline of indiscipline” (2006) you, the lecturer, become the author of the moment. The act of creativity is restored to the classroom. The frisson of risk electrifies the process, as with one’s actual *writing* practice, when, in those precious hours snatched from the demands of the week, you sit down to do some of your own writing. Yes, you do the research, you make your preparations, but when you turn up at the page or the screen to write, *something else happens*: a different part of the brain engages – a lateral process takes over. If we wish to authentically offer our students genuine techniques or practices, ones we use ourselves in our craft, then where better to start than with this – the white heat of the moment – when anything may emerge? As a writer it is this moment when I am freest and most fully alive. There is a sense of being an explorer in an undiscovered continent. This is the quality I wish to bring into the classroom. As Stephanie Vanderslice suggests, “it is more important

than ever to draw back the curtain on the wizard and show undergraduates the many invention tricks writers rely upon to get started and to keep the well of inspiration at an optimum level.” (2011: 32)

Alas, teaching (of the “factory farming” kind, and I’ve personally found this worse in FE than HE) can seriously debilitate the creative aquifer. Schemes of work, lesson plans, set texts, assessments ... the structures of creative writing as a taught discipline can stifle the very thing they are trying to nurture – resulting in exhausted, demoralized lecturers (as informal conversations at conferences suggest and the strikes of 2016 attest) and uninspired, disengaged students (as evidenced by the dreaded Student Survey). In this article I argue for a possibly radical approach (accepting that any writing teacher worth their salt probably uses some form of “wild writing”), but one that can still work in tandem with existing pedagogical systems. There *is* a place for the lecture, the seminar, the practical focus of a workshop, tutorials, assessment, hard pedagogy – but also for “wild writing”, as I would call it, following in the spirit of Roger Deakin’s “wild swimming” (2000) and the other analogous activities his approach inspired. Wild writing empowers both the lecturer and students. It credits teachers with intelligence and resourcefulness. Wild writing encourages us to take risks, to go beyond comfort zones and familiar ways of doing things.

Although wild writing is a practice I have been intuitively cultivating all of my writing life, a cross-fertilization of my storytelling, creative writing and teaching skills, I first articulated it as a practice when I was invited to North America in September 2015 to offer some workshops privately to a small group. Wild writing spontaneously happened as we toured Rhode Island and beyond. One time, a scintillating cove inspired some “reflections”; another time, it was the site of an old fun fair which unearthed long-buried emotions

and memories. However, I will focus on the experience of devising my “Wild Writing” class, which took place at Hawkwood College, Gloucestershire, in the Spring term of 2016. In doing so I do not wish to be prescriptive, but at best inspirational, so I won’t be offering detailed activities, since the very spirit of wild writing is to be in the moment, to draw upon the actuality of the workshop, the resources and experience of the group, and your own ingenuity. This accords with what Harry Whitehead describes as a praxis of “nomadic emergence” (2013).

Faced with the relentless treadmill of teaching – my life measured out in writing workshops, marking and coffee spoons – my original motivation was to devise a way of breaking free of this cycle and reinvigorate my pedagogy. If I am bored the students will be too. Rather than regurgitate the usual maxims about using notebooks, showing not telling, et cetera – which can be found in numerous books, blogs and MOOCs – I wondered what new approach I could offer based upon my actual practice as a writer. My *USP*, to use that hissing serpent of a marketing term. I don’t want to be a Mr Potato Head teacher: change my distinguishing features and I could be saying the same as anyone else. The best teachers, the ones you remember, are always the ones who do things differently, who break the rules in some way, even if it’s just in their “manner”. My favourite English teacher at school, Mr Alsop, would at the drop of a hat sound off about his pet subjects: Rugby and Bruce Springsteen. His droll delivery was reminiscent of the late comedian Mel Smith. Somehow, through his raconteur genius he enthused the class with his love of literature. We enjoyed his class and so we paid attention. He engaged our interest. And there was a frisson of unpredictability about his lessons; we could go “off-piste” at any moment.

Play is an often forgotten element of learning, but one that the poet Paul Matthews advocates: “Writing can become very intense and inward at times, so play and laughter (as well as tears) are a vital part of any group work.” (1994:7)

As I was teaching two Open University modules (A215; A363) and a local Adult Education evening class on novel-writing, I wanted to try something different, something less technical and more spontaneous. This not only provided a personal “call to adventure” to my

own pedagogical ingenuity, it actually helped as a counter-balance to the other classes I taught. As I put it to a friend, one approach was “Apollonian”, the other “Dionysian”: left-brained and right-brained, if you will, although such crude demarcation of our mind’s complexity is flawed – a false dichotomy – as Gilchrist (2012) and others have demonstrated. The two approaches, the creative and the critical, cross-fertilize in the best workshops and writing practice – but I wanted, as an experiment, to separate the methodologies and see what would happen.

The first half of my week was dedicated to traditional pedagogy, but my Wednesday night Wild Writing class became something I actually looked forward to: a safety valve from the assessment-focused pressure of the week. A chance to take a different approach; to turn off the sat-nav.

Unlike my other classes, I deliberately did *not* devise a scheme of work for my wild writing workshops. I made only the vaguest of lesson plans – a hastily-scribbled idea that emerged on the day of the class, usually while out “wild-running” in my local woodland, allowing the birdsong, running water, sun-dappled shade and green work its magic on my consciousness. Rather than forcing a theme or an activity onto the page or screen, I would allow things to emerge – by simply being fully present in a natural environment. Taking a leaf from WB Yeats’ “Wandering Aengus”, I went out to a hazel wood. Soon the fire in my head was lit.

In the first session I explained my “anti-outline” – each week we would see what emerged. I might have a few prompts up my sleeve, just in case, but I was determined that the workshop would be an organic, emergent process. To break the ice, I got everyone to give themselves a “wild epithet”, an alliterative one that provided a useful mnemonic. This also encouraged them to “inhabit” the wild paradigm, to feel the wildness inside themselves. I read out the course description, to focalize:

*Are your words too tame? Do your ideas need liberating? Let them out of the cage, and allow them to prowl the page! This rule-breaking writing workshop is designed to encourage you to explore the untamed fringes of your desires and fears, to express that inner howl, to give voice to that long-denied cry. You’ll be supported in a friendly, safe environment to venture*

*beyond comfort zones and tap into words that can electrify, shock, motivate and move. All you need is a pen and paper and a willingness to be wild!*

I asked them to come up with their own definitions of “wild” – writing suggestions on post-it notes, and sticking them on the board. They came up with:

Raw  
 Unfettered  
 Free  
 Sensual  
 Vulnerable  
 Uncensored  
 Secrets  
 Passionate  
 Spontaneous  
 Edgy  
 Nature  
 Embodied  
 Fear/less  
 Landscape  
 Deep emotion  
 Out of the box  
 Undefined  
 Pure  
 Untamed  
 Energy  
 Down to Earth  
 From the unconscious  
 Climate  
 Nonsensical  
 Life going wrong  
 Experiential  
 Abstract/extreme

This was a promisingly wide-spread demarcation of territory. A freewrite on the theme also bore fruit – the very nature of that practice lent itself to the prompt perfectly. The best freewrites are of course “wild”, that is ludic, non-linear, exploratory, transgressive, and syntactically feral. In the spirit of Natalie Goldberg, I encouraged my students to “lose control” (1991:3).

The first lesson’s emergent theme was summed up by this in-the-moment acronym: SOAR (Sensuality; Observation; Awareness; Reflection), something of an OCD of mine! Being fond of creative acronyms and aware of the potential can of worms I was opening, I

created a “safety net” for the workshops using my principle of MAC: Mindfulness; Autonomy; Confidentiality.

**Mindfulness:** being aware of the potential impact of what you are sharing. Not to censor yourself, but if the writing contains strong language, disturbing imagery, controversial elements, et cetera, to let people know.

**Autonomy:** you always have the choice about what you share. No one is expected to share, although everyone is encouraged to do so at least once in the workshop.

**Confidentiality:** what is shared within the workshop is confidential. If you wish to share or discuss your own work outside of the workshop that is your choice, but respect the privacy of others.

I also emphasized that the wildness should be focused *on the page*, and usual workshop etiquette applied. For such a class it was essential that a “strong container” was created to hold the participants in their process. My wish was to encourage my students to go beyond their comfort zones (in their writing). To try out new forms or genres. To go to the edge of what they think they “can” or “should” say, what they might be “allowed” to write about. To inject their writing with some adrenalin, with strong emotions, with a bold, embodied voice. To have the courage to show up to the page and to face its nullifying whiteness, to shatter its silence, and defy those negative voices which might have inhibited in the past. As Whitman put it in “One Hour of Madness and Joy”: “O to have the gag removed from one’s mouth” (1959: 80). In response to my suggestion to recite this poem of Whitman’s out loud, outside, a student responded: “Just what I needed to shout right now. Thank you.”

Over the ten weeks I tried a range of approaches, using not only the usual examples of writing (“wild writers” such as Emily Dickinson, Mary Oliver, DH Lawrence, John Clare, Ivor Gurney, Gary Snyder, Nan Shepherd, Robert Macfarlane, Ted Hughes, Helen MacDonald, and Henry Miller) but also different media and methodologies. Beyond the usual triggers of art, music, movement and objects that any creative writing teacher might draw upon, I tried out the following:

*Using different approaches to handwriting* (writing without

looking at the page; writing in different directions, e.g. from the edges of the page inwards, across the margins); *Using what arises* (my experience of storytelling has taught me to use whatever arises as part of the performance, so, if a phone goes off, include it in the oral narrative. I applied this approach to each session. If we were interrupted, e.g. by a fire alarm test – I saw it as a gift. A news item, or the weather – anything may trigger a creative response).

The details here are not as important as the general approach: *be wildly inventive*. What I deliberately did *not* do was draw upon my usual repertoire of creative

writing resources – my tried-and-trusted handouts, my go-to activities. I did not want to be teaching on auto-pilot. This forced me to invest creative energy into the actuality of the workshop – what I love doing best. This is when I feel I am firing on all cylinders as a teacher – plucking ideas, quotations, activities and approaches from the air. Not as a micro-managed teaching drone. As Freire puts it, rather than being the “anti-dialogical banking educator”, focused on recruitment, retention and results, I wish to emphasize the ‘dialogical character of education as the practice of freedom’ (1996: 74). Student and teacher should enter into a porous space where learning can happen in any direction – where both parties can feel a sense of creative liberty within the classroom, as sacrosanct as the white page or blank screen.

### Student Writing

Much of what was written in class was by nature ephemeral – composed quickly in response to a prompt, shared fresh from the notebook, and then “let go of” like Buddhist sand mandalas. A few pieces *were* brought in the following week after being worked on at home (for example, the prompt to “write about a wild time” triggered a visceral, kinetic piece of life-writing about seeing a punk band as a student in the 70s – something the student hadn’t thought about “in years”). The emphasis of the workshops was on process more than polished artefacts, but here are some to give some idea.

### Shooting Crows

I watched a man shooting crows.

I felt the recoil and fall.

I teased apart the feathers  
and the little cracked hearts for answers.

All I found was the finish,  
the filth and the spore.  
There’s no meaning in dried eyes.

The resting of the carcasses  
in the field down by the burn  
where the ducks nested;  
the sorrel greened on the blood.

*Student 1. Prompt: write about the natural world.*

### Elephant in the Room

In our room there’s a jade green hippo  
with carving knife teeth in a man-trap jaw  
Baleful eyes bubbling from the brown  
sluggish river of sewage and mud  
Submerged in slurping bellicosity  
it’s poised to drown me in the sloppy miasma  
and amputate my manhood

Give me an elephant in the room  
any vindaloo Taj Mahal tiffin  
with trumpet voluntary to welcome me,  
an embracing trunk to snuffle my neck  
and never to forget we’re lovers  
It would sprinkle me with cool paddy water  
Whilst we swayed through orchards of pink mango

*Student 2. Prompt: write about something extremely improbable.*

### “You want wild words”

You want wild words  
Man made creations  
Tamed by the intellect

I will show you wild Ness  
 In her bare foot bare faced  
 Nakedness  
 crouching low amongst the  
 Dank rotting earth

*Student 3. Prompt: what does wildness mean to you?*

### Skep Skin

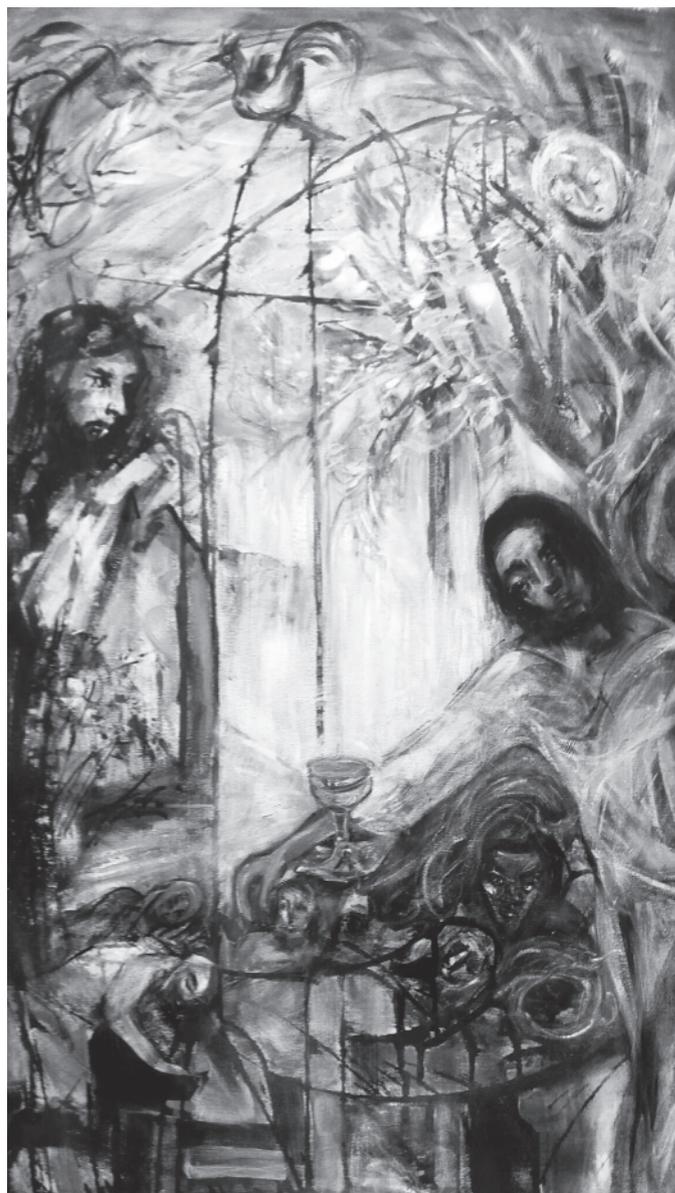
A hive in my hand  
 honeycomb hollow  
 oozing nectar  
 golden energy  
 gathered again and again  
 a lifetime's work  
 in a teaspoon  
 stir into your tea  
 consciously  
 soothing the raw edges  
 of the day  
 sweetness delivered  
 by black and yellow drones  
 a sticky note  
 from the flowers  
 a souvenir of the sun  
 summer on the wing  
 an orchard on my tongue

*Student 4. Prompt: write about what's in your pocket right now (a small tin of Burt's Bees handsalve).*

### Conclusion

I found running my wild writing workshop one of the most interesting and rewarding things I have done in recent years in terms of my teaching. As in all teaching I learnt just as much in delivering it as I hoped my students did in experiencing it. It was a continual learning curve which forced me out of any kind of pedagogical complacency. It was challenging and engaging in the right places – making me re-evaluate everything I usually do in a writing workshop.

From my experience of running these workshops, I would advocate the following: include a “wild writing” hour in your weekly schedule – it'll be good for you and



Example of student artwork used to generate writing:  
 Patricia Goode, “Garden of Gethsemane”, 2015, acrylic

your students. Suggest it to your department: see what happens. Get out of the classroom – take your group into nature and write “on the hoof”. Allow yourself to go to the edge of your practice, of your writing, explore those uncomfortable places, give voice to the shadows, the songs of the maniacs:

*He who approaches the temple of the Muses without inspiration, in the belief that craftsmanship alone suffices, will remain a bungler and his presumptuous poetry will be obscured by the songs of the maniacs. Plato (Flaherty 2013: 63)*

Institutional bureaucracy is inevitable, but when it actually impedes teaching and, as a result, impacts upon the sacred cow of “student experience”, then *it must be questioned*. Common sense would surely suggest that we only use systems that support what it is we are trying to do, rather than force ourselves into straitjackets that over-complicate, dessicate and demoralize. In recent years much has been written about the debilitating tendency in universities to focus on the financial aspects of the process (Warner 2015). This mindset is counter-productive to the quality of teaching and research. Students are expecting guaranteed results as the pay-off of their “investment”. As student satisfaction is the gold standard that we are now beholden to, there is a worrying trend which those in HE are all too aware of (the thing that should not be spoken): reducing standards to “please the students”, because they “pay our bills”. Although I haven’t had to do this myself ... yet ... the notion appals me. When we compromise standards for the sake of student retention and satisfaction something is deeply-flawed. The baby has been thrown out with the bathwater. Surely we need to be less goal-driven and target-focused. The best writing does not emerge through narrow commercial imperatives or through a checklist of techniques, a dry naming of parts. We must create a culture of learning, knowledge, open-mindedness, exploration, and invention. Wild writing could be a small part of that: an oasis of creativity for creativity’s sake, mutually enriching to teachers and students.

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- Many more titles were used during the development and delivery of these workshops. For an extensive reading list of Wild Writing titles, or to offer suggestions or comments, contact the author: km364@le.ac.uk.*

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# Learning and teaching creativity

## Asking *how* rather than *can* or *should*

Louise Tondeur



The first half of this article began life as a blog post and part of a panel discussion at NAWE's 2014 conference. The second, practical half is adapted from a session I run at the University of Roehampton. As a whole, it suggests that we ask *how* to

learn and teach creativity, rather than *can* / *should* it be taught. Creative thinking and acting are so important that we cannot ignore or relegate opportunities to teach it. Creative Writing programmes have a crucial contribution to make to this learning and teaching process. I start by looking at the misunderstandings implicit in circular questions about Creative Writing and why we need to move beyond them. I argue that, pragmatically, it is better to look at *how* creativity is learnt and taught. I briefly refer to Rachel Cusk's article in *The Guardian* where we see evidence that some writers do not *want* writing to be taught and at Hanif Kureishi's fairly recent comments about his students, before suggesting that what David Cormier calls "rhizomatic education", coupled with "contingency" are both integral. What then follows is an example session plan that is intended to undermine the idea that creative practice is esoteric and unlearnable. The session plan engages with close observation and mindfulness, in line with the idea that creative practice is a *process*, and allows students to think about how these concepts apply to the writing life. One cannot write about teaching creativity and be prescriptive, therefore the session plan sets up a series of questions, discussions and writing activities.

### A circular question

A plethora of writers and researchers have written about creativity and what it means, and what it means to teach it to others. For example, the works of Anna Craft, Rob Pope, Robert Sternberg and Paul Torrance give the lie to the notion that creativity is somehow indefinable and inaccessible. (See, for instance, Craft and Jeffrey 2004, Kim 2006, Pope 2005 and Sternberg 2006.) Even so, Paul Dawson opens his book, *Creative Writing and the New Humanities*, by owning that:

*Since the inception of writing programmes the most prominent discussions about Creative Writing have been concerned with its legitimacy as an academic discipline, [...] tend[ing] to revolve around a simplistic polemic, manifested in the perennial question, can writing be taught? and its corollary should it be taught? (Dawson 2005: 1)*

The question "can writing be taught? and [...] *should* it be taught?" has already been written about elegantly but it is often repeated in popular discourses.<sup>1</sup> The body of literature investigating creativity and education is so robust that it is almost embarrassing to hear this popular idiom repeated. A fairly recent example originated with Hanif Kureishi, and was repeated across various media outlets,<sup>2</sup> but it tends to crop up regularly in British newspapers. Typical of this kind of argument is that referred to by Claire Armitstead (2007), writing in *The Guardian* after Martin Amis was made Professor at Manchester, and often the media returns to the debate when a famous writer is appointed in this way. In this repetitive discourse, a critique of what one might call a "commodification framework", that one could apply to the whole of higher education, is targeted at the creative arts, and at Creative Writing in particular.

The reiteration of a question like this in the media has an impact on Creative Writing tutors and students, and it also has implications for the way both creative education and teaching are perceived culturally. But I would like to propose that the issue has wider ramifications and is therefore even more important. Creative thinking and doing are essential in today's climate. In our current economic situation, and given the serious problems facing society in general, creativity ought to be highly sought after. The implications are too important to ignore. Creativity *can* be taught. More than ever, we need to learn how to think and act creatively, and Creative Writing programmes have a role in that process.

As Tim Clare illustrates so memorably in a blog post rebutting Hanif Kureishi's comments about his students (see Clare 2014, and Clark and Jones 2014), the misunderstanding in the questions "can writing be taught? and [...] *should* it be taught?" (Dawson 2005: 1) hinges on the word *taught*, or its root word *teach*. When *teach* is treated as if it is passive, the questions suggest that the answer is already no. The first chapter of Paul Dawson's book gives a fuller context, which I do not need to repeat here, but for the current article it is notable that the question "is it possible to teach Creative Writing?" suggests a rather clichéd figure of a writer, a tortured genius and a kind of writing that it is not possible to learn.

Pointing out that there are particular technicalities of writing which can be passed on, or that "self-expression" is not enough without redrafting, or suggesting that courses provide a framework for students to practise their writing and to read, although honest and pragmatic, is not a full enough answer because, at least on some occasions, the question implies, before it has been answered by anyone who knows about it, that Creative Writing is a commodity being sold to unsuspecting students, and meanwhile so called "traditional" subjects are not read in a similar way. Ironically those espousing this point of view give no credence or voice to the student writers themselves, or to the idea that one might learn writing for a variety of reasons. After more than twenty years of teaching experience, I can tell you categorically that not everyone studying Creative Writing wants to be a published novelist, just as not everyone studying Drama wants to be an actor.

Another facet of the contradictions that circulate around this question can be understood from the end of Rachel Cusk's article, "In praise of the creative writing course" (2013). There she describes an outburst from a writer upset by the rise of Creative Writing courses:

*Why, he wanted to know, were writers giving encouragement to this abysmal creative writing trend? Why were they perpetuating the fallacy that writing can be taught? Did they really want writing to become a [...] pastime for old ladies and bored housewives [...] It was that writer's own insecurity that required him to distinguish himself from old ladies and housewives, to be the "real" writer, the centre of attention.* (Cusk 13)

Here we see a fear – expressed by a so-called "real" writer – of the democratization of creative writing. That he particularly wishes to exclude housewives and old women is additionally troubling – without housewives and old women we would be without countless works of literature – but not surprising, given that aspects of the writing scene can also be androcentric. It is not only those with similar anxiety about being classed "real" writers who reiterate this idiom. Others with a vested interest also want to keep writers special, distant, separate and mysterious.

If we take this into consideration, we no longer have a question about whether writing *can* be taught, but rather we discover the existence of an antagonistic paradigm that does not *want* it to be taught, where writing is a secret and only the worthy deserve admittance. Clare's answer to Kureishi calls out the "can/should" debate as unnecessary, and he does that by championing creative teachers; creative teachers who are so easily ignored..

There are many reasons to write. Writing for publication is only one of those reasons. Anyone who tells you otherwise is flatly wrong. Writing for wellbeing, for instance, is another motivation. (Have a look at the work of Lapidus, for example). Creative Writing teaches effective communication. How many times have you watched the news to discover that the root of a serious, often tragic problem was a lack of good communication? Communication, far from being a "soft" skill, is key to solving many local and global problems. It isn't even really a "skill", but rather a life's work, something one embodies. I am not trying to claim that the teaching of creativity and of writing is a solution to all difficult and

complex problems, but it does have at least a part to play. And why not write for the sake of it, like you might dance or sing? I must say that, when I first started, I never thought of coming up with a reason to write: I simply wanted to do it. I couldn't help myself.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, a reductive paradigm about learning and teaching writing, as Cusk's troubled writer attests, appears to preclude other motivations for writing. This kind of debate reminds me of one of my favourite quotations, from Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa":

*And why don't you write? Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it. I know why you haven't written [...] Because writing is at once too high, too great for you, it's reserved for the great-that is for "great men"; and it's "silly."* (Cixous 1975: 335)

Cixous wrote that in the 1970s, but here we have a contemporary discourse, as Cusk discusses, that suggests that writing is "for 'great men'; and it's 'silly.'" Perhaps we can listen again to Cixous saying "why don't you write? Write! Writing is for you" and move away from circular debates about whether writing can be taught and instead look at *how* creative writing is learnt and taught.

### Rhizomatic learning and contingency

If you've read this far, you probably agree that it is a reductive cultural idiom that treats teaching as if it involves the receipt of a skill by a learner, via some kind of dissemination, in what, in some contexts, is an economic exchange.<sup>4</sup> The learner pays, the teacher imparts knowledge. This is a highly limited and limiting view of learning and teaching anyway, but especially in a creative context. Creative learning and teaching involves a dialogue between student and teacher through a variety of planned interactions, including conversations between learner and teacher and opportunities for the student to shape the learning, and here I am inspired by a rather loose application of the term "dialogic teaching" (Alexander 2004). For instance, David Cormier (2008) writes about "rhizomatic education" where learning is "negotiated" and continually overlaps with other forms of knowing:

*A botanical metaphor, first posited by Deleuze and Guattari in A Thousand Plateaus (1987), may offer a more flexible*

*conception of knowledge for the information age: the rhizome. A rhizomatic plant has no center and no defined boundary; rather, it is made up of a number of semi-independent nodes, each of which is capable of growing and spreading on its own [...] In the rhizomatic view, knowledge can only be negotiated.* (Cormier 2008)

Where it might seem sensible and appropriate to follow a systematic delivery of teaching involving policy, planning, dissemination, evaluation and feedback, creative learning and teaching often involve the unexpected, learning in the moment, learning from the interaction between the people present in the room, but also from the circumstance itself. This contingency is an experience similar to – although not exactly the same as – the way in which one might understand a performance or a piece of art in the moment, an encounter that can only be partially described and reflected upon, but not repeated, once the moment has past. Contingency does not necessarily involve a lack of planning (although one way to try it is to allow for one or two unplanned sessions in a term) but rather, a different attitude to the process. One allows for disjuncture, change and new meaning to emerge.

What follows now is a practical example of the *how* of Creative Writing teaching, and indeed the teaching of creativity generally. It appears rather mundane on the page. It only comes to life when teacher and student experience the activities together – in other words, contingency plays a part.

### Example session plan: Pay attention or how to keep your eyes open.

This session is designed to allow you to discuss the following with students:

- Dispensing with inspiration
- Turning up at the page
- Close observation
- Mindfulness
- Being a mindful writer

### Practical activities

There are several opportunities, here, for writing activities and discussions, which could be done during the session or after it. Mix up the activities so that some

are done solo, others in pairs or small groups, and some as whole class discussions. Some can be either written or verbal or both, and you can add sharing, evaluation and reflection after each one if you wish. There are no timings given, because most of these activities could become sessions in their own right, or could be done independently. Don't follow the plan as if it were a schedule. Be flexible with it instead.

### Resources required

- Students need a pen and paper or a laptop and an object to observe.
- You may want to put the quotations on a screen for everyone to see.
- You might also want to put the practical activities on a handout so students can practise at home.

### Warm up

Ask students to describe their journey to the workshop, homing in on any specific details.

### Imagine a day

Ask students to do the following. Think for a moment that being a writer is just like any other job. You turn up and do it. So: you're a writer. What's your working day like? This could lead to a discussion about writing as a job, and the routines and roles involved.

### Dispense with inspiration

*Let's dispense with inspiration from the start, because nothing causes more dissatisfaction and disappointment in a writer's life than the myth of the thunderbolt.* (Moore 2014)

*The single best piece of advice I can offer to anyone trying to do creative work is to ignore inspiration.* (Currey 2013, cited by Newport 2016)

Ask students the following:

- Have a look at the quotation from Dinty Moore's *The Mindful Writer* and from the blog post by Mason Currey, above. What is the "myth of the thunderbolt" (Moore 2014)?
- Are you worried about having to write something original?

- You might want to include some discussion of mindfulness as a cultural object and the problems with it now it has become fashionable. In order to highlight the problems with the 'fad' of mindfulness with students, you might like to discuss Karen Heller's article in the *Washington Post* (2016), that describes how one can buy mindful tea, burgers and a diet, amongst other associated cultural phenomenon.

### Turn up at the page

*Some of our best writing may be done on the days when we feel the most stifled. The important thing is to turn up at the page and begin.* (Cameron 2010)

Discuss the following with students. Think faultless, aesthetically-pleasing, original writing will stream from your pen if only you could think of an idea? Not true, for at least two reasons:

1) You have to turn up to the page regularly. For example, try freewriting for half an hour a day for a week. Peter Elbow gives a good description of freewriting at the start of his book *Writing with Power* (1998: 13–19) if you need one.

2) Writing is about rewriting, and rewriting, and rewriting. Writing is about craft, not the first draft.

### Don't try to be original. Observe instead.

Forget about trying to be innovative, new or original. Writing is a process. What to do instead: observe your local environment, the details of it, observe your emotions, your sense impressions in as much specific detail as possible. Make this a regular practice. Spend time writing it down. Make a promise to yourself to notice and observe, to look at the world with a writer's eye.

### Close Observation

Ask students to do the following writing activity. If you are doing this in class, you can time the observations. Observations can last for a short time 1 or 5 minutes, or even as much as 45 minutes. You can also ask students to find objects for one another to observe:

- Choose any object (mundane, interesting, natural,

man-made) and watch it for a while.

- Now write about what the textures of the object suggest.
- Observe the object for five more minutes.
- After the observation, write what you experienced.
- Look back over all you've done. Underline any phrases or images that you particularly like.
- Afterwards, ask yourself or a partner: Was it difficult? Is this the way you usually write? What did you like about it?
- Now ask students to try close observation using particular senses and to put the experience into words.
- The next stage is to go outside and observe something. Set a time limit and some ground rules. Repeat the above steps, but ask students to spend time observing whatever they choose *first* before writing.

Whether we are “professional observers [...] of the world” (Sontag 2011) or observers of the specific details in our local environment, to write is to observe. The word “observe” has a visual bias, but as far as writing is concerned it means noticing things, experiencing the details, using all of your senses.

### Pay attention

The average person “looks without seeing, listens without hearing, touches without feeling, eats without tasting, moves without physical awareness, inhales without awareness of odour or fragrance, and talks without thinking.” (Borg 1998)<sup>5</sup>

A writer is someone who breaks this cycle and who becomes aware, who goes through life paying attention.

### Walk down a street

Ask students to do the following. Imagine walking down a street. (Any street, town, city, village, picture it.) There are two ways of walking down the street:

- 1) On automaton: if I walk hunched down the street, with a heavy bag, not looking where I'm going, making no eye contact with anyone, I'm like a robot. On autopilot.
- 2) Or I could notice things around me, and about myself. I could engage all my senses. I could identify myself in my surroundings. I notice things. I pay attention.

### What is mindfulness?

*non-judgemental attention and awareness to the present moment* (Baker 2014)

“Mindfulness” has become a popular concept recently, but while treating mindfulness as if it is a cure-all isn't advisable, it is helpful to think of what it means to be a mindful writer. *The Mindful Writer* by Dinty Moore (2012) is a book about Buddhism and writing, which explores this concept.<sup>6</sup> With that caveat, the practice of mindfulness is useful generally, but we can also turn it into a specific and pragmatic tool, and use it to deepen our writing.

### A note about spirituality and writing

Some of the best-selling writing practitioners talk about their own spiritual paths when they discuss the creative process, whilst encouraging us to pay attention and to be writer-observers. Examples include Anne Lamont in *Bird by Bird* (1980), Julia Cameron in *The Artist's Way* (1995) and Natalie Goldberg in her various books on writing. However, the application of mindfulness to writing doesn't have to be spiritual, it can be entirely pragmatic and secular.

### Activities to try

- Close observation on the bus, tube, train. Making some notes on the close specific detail.
- Close observation of your own street. Making some notes on the colours of the front doors, the texture of the pavement, or what you notice about the rubbish, the trees, the wheelie bins.
- Notice a particular colour for a set amount of time. Spend your morning noticing different shades of red, for instance, and writing about it.
- Pay attention to a walk (to work, through the park, with the dog) and recording some sense impressions afterwards.
- Create a regular practice. Engaging in deliberate “paying attention” activities or close observation at least once a week.

### Concluding thoughts

The more one practices paying attention, observation from life, and turning up at the page, the more one will

learn how to write. As a creative teacher, by allowing these practices to become part of my own life, I will become a better (more practised) teacher and writer. When we see student writers as fellow travellers, we can also say this: I understand myself as always a student writer, because I always have more to learn, and I learn by teaching and teach by learning. I can get to know the *how* of Creative Writing teaching by understanding the negotiation of knowledge (“rhizomatic education”) and the role of contingency, and by allowing these to become more important than writing exercises or workshopping on their own.

### Notes

1. For a full answer to the question of whether creative writing can be taught, see Dawson 2005, Pope 2005 and Wandor 2008.
2. See, for instance, Alice Jones and Nick Clark in *The Independent*, 3 March 2014, and Hayley Dixon in *The Telegraph* and Alison Flood in *The Guardian*, 4 March, and Will Buckingham’s response in the *Times Higher Education*, 13 March, or an article from Kureishi in *The Telegraph*, from January of the same year.
3. I refer you to an article I wrote that appeared in *Writing in Education* in 2014 called “Versions of Creative Writing Teaching”, which provides more information on different kinds of learning and teaching in Creative Writing.
4. I am reminded here of the images of the robot teacher at Jiujiang University that circulated on social media last year.
5. The “looks without seeing” quotation is widely attributed to Leonardo da Vinci and cited by James Borg in his book *Persuasion* (2007). Borg is probably working from Michael Gelb’s self-help book, *How to Think Like Leonardo Da Vinci*. There is a similar quotation in all three of the synoptic gospels, for instance: “Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.” Matthew 13:10-15.
6. If you need a summary definition of Mindfulness, see, for instance, the Wild Mind website: <http://www.wildmind.org/applied/daily-life/what-is-mindfulness>

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### A Circular “Can/Should” Debate

Hanif Kureishi wrote an article for *The Telegraph* at the end of January 2014 to promote his latest novel. Having been made Professor of Creative Writing at Kingston in October 2013, he took teaching Creative Writing as his theme, calling for new writers to go beyond learning about dialogue and structure and to take risks. I am guessing that Kureishi picked up a similar theme when he spoke at the Independent Bath Literature Festival in March 2014.

On 3 March, *The Independent*, reporting on the festival they sponsor, ran an article – also promoting the new novel – called “Independent Bath Literature Festival: Creative writing courses are a waste of time, says Hanif Kureishi (who teaches one)” with the byline: “it’s a real nightmare trying to make a living as a writer” (Clark and Jones 2014). To be fair to Kureishi, although he was reported as criticizing Creative Writing courses and students, he said that he tries to nurture his Creative Writing students, and argues “You’ve got to try and find one teacher who can really help you” (Clark and Jones 2014). In other words, he did talk about good teaching.

*The Guardian* repeated the story the next day (Flood 2014) focusing – as you might imagine – on the more controversial comments rather than these more nuanced ones. However, the most negative quotations in *The Guardian* story actually come from former Creative Writing tutor, Lucy Ellmann, who talks more about the machinations of the corporate university rather than the concept of learning and teaching creativity itself, and this article also includes defences of Creative Writing courses from Jeanette Winterson, Rachel Cusk and Matt Haig.

*The Bookseller* and *The Telegraph* both pick up on the story on 4 March, again focusing on the more controversial comments. *The Bookseller* includes a brief rebuttal from Jonny Geller at Curtis Brown. *The Telegraph* comments that “Kureishi described his own teaching role as one between mentor and therapist” (Dixon 2014), so – again – there is at least some credence given to teaching. On 7 March, BBC Radio ran a short debate on *BBC World Update* called “Teaching creative writing a ‘waste of time’”. Like the

rest of the material quoted here, this radio programme is still available online. In other words, there is plenty of potential for the issue to be reduced, repeated and reinvented. I think it is very likely that Kureishi’s comments were taken out of context, but the debate they generated certainly started to take on a life of its own.

There are numerous responses, on both sides of the fence, including an article by Will Buckingham in *The Times Higher Education* on 13 March entitled “Hanif Kureishi is wrong about students”. Buckingham takes issue with essentialist readings of “talent”, arguing that “talent, like phlogiston, is a hypothesis we should do away with” and that this reductive debate is “appallingly dismissive [...] of students’ potential” (Buckingham 2014).

For me, Tim Clare’s response to *The Guardian* article on Kureishi is the most memorable rebuttal. What Clare does in his blog post (2014) is to move the focus onto encounters with inspiring *teachers* and away from the “possibility” or otherwise of being able to teach writing. Clare discusses the comments attributed to Kureishi (which were repeated several times as I’ve illustrated). He is at pains to point out that he is riffing on the quotations *attributed* to Kureishi and that the writer may have been misquoted, but reading Clare’s response soon makes the “can/should” debate itself seem redundant.

Clare allows us to look at the argument the other way round. It is simply not the case that it is impossible to teach creativity or writing, but rather, only creative teachers know how to do it. Some writers don’t know how to teach. Why should they? To co-opt the infamous words apparently spoken at the Bath Literature Festival, “probably 99.9 per cent [...] are not talented” enough to be teachers (Clark and Jones 2014). Of course, in line with what Will Buckingham says in *The Times Higher Education*, I’m using the term “talented” with a big dose of salt. If you haven’t read Tim Clare’s blog, please do: it is inspiring.

# Teaching the art of re-creation

Ginna Brock



One of the frustrating questions for a teacher of creative writing is how to foster student creativity: how to help students grasp the limitless possibilities of their craft. If *ex nihilo nihil fit*—“out of nothing, nothing comes”—is accepted, then creativity can ever only be an act of re-creation: originality, then, is the reworking of existing models into something new. In this way, the teaching of creative writing must include

an examination of established works in order to inform a student’s creative process. Writing is a process, a long, detailed—and sometimes excruciating—wrestle with language, concepts, structure, voice and aesthetic choices. Yet how will students know the possibilities intrinsic in their craft if they are not exposed to some of the masters of the trade? Creative writing is a craft, and I tell my students that they are apprentices, and my job is to help them sit at the feet of some of the masters, as a means of informing their own creative production. However, the negotiation of classical texts can create anxiety for novice readers attempting to navigate the complexity of language and heighten literary expression. To this end, I have developed an assessment item (the SOAR journal) that leads students from critical reading to creative writing.

My pedagogical approach to teaching creative writing at the university level has been developed through my study of four Ancient Greek terms: *techne*, *poiesis*, *praxis* and *episteme*. Although these terms have morphed in definition and understanding throughout the years, these concepts evoke a creative framework for the

relationship between craft, process and product (see Figure 1). The ultimate goal is to help students understand not only how they crafted a certain piece, but also why they chose those specific techniques. Adapted from Plato’s concept, I call the fusion between the knowledge of craft, the practice of craft and the reflection on the craft’s achievement, “creative intentionality”—fully understanding and purposely crafting an artefact for an intended effect. One of the criticisms of the discipline of creative writing is that it does not challenge existing epistemologies and theories by producing new knowledge, and thereby stays on the periphery of the academy (Donnelly 2011). Without a more holistic understanding of the creative process, the focus on solely producing an artefact is insufficient as it hinders the students’ acquisition of skills, and limits their understanding of how their work fits within the larger scope of literary production. To avoid stifling a student’s potentiality, I have developed a philosophy that applies Ancient Greek concepts to the discipline of creative writing. My philosophy merges the technical understanding of craft (*techne*), with the trialing of techniques (*poiesis*), which leads to an informed reflection of their artefact (*praxis*) in an attempt to produce new knowledge (*episteme*).

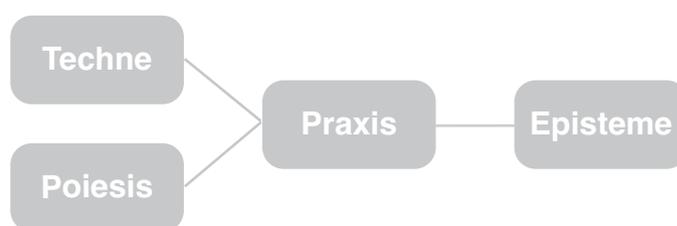


Figure 1: process towards creative knowledge

Ultimately, I want to lead my students toward new knowledge—knowledge that emerges through their

reflection of creative technique and achievement (*episteme*). However, this is the last stage of the process. The first goal is to help students understand the relationship between technical knowledge (*techne*) and practical expression (*poiesis*). The awareness of the *techne*, or the technical skill behind the creation of an artefact, is essential to expressing the inherent value of a piece. Aristotle, in *Nicomachean Ethics*, positions *techne* as craftsmanship; the art of manipulating tools in order to produce something. Analyzing the *techne*, or technical method, of classical writers produces a more extensive set of literary and narrative tools for the students to manipulate. Analysis of the *techne* focuses not only on the technical tool itself, but also on the function of that tool—what is achieved through its deployment. From this new knowledge, students can practise these tools in their own writing: this practice of craft is a form of *poiesis*—the process of “making”, of “bringing forth”, and can be viewed as a type of transformation and revelation. In order to “break form” or manipulate tradition, one must first grasp its function and technique. *Poiesis* moves from the technical knowledge of craft to the actual production of an artefact, through the employment of chosen narrative and literary tools.

For many students the idea of critical reading—reading to discover technical method—is foreign, or they parallel it to its literary counterpart, critical analysis. Yet, while the two approaches both analyze the literary devices and narrative techniques, instead of analyzing for meaning and message, the creative writing students investigate the craft, innovation, and significance of a piece in order to then emulate and trial new techniques in their own writing. In this way, we are using the classic texts not just as a backdrop for creative expression, but as textbooks that offer lessons and ideas for creative practice. Roger Scruton, in his lecture at *The Sunday Times* Hay-on-Wye Book Festival, 2001, stated:

*Real originality does not defy convention but depends on it. You can only “make it new” when the newness is perceivable, which means departing from conventions while at the same time affirming them. Hence, originality requires tradition if it is to make artistic sense. (Scruton, 2001)*

The idea that “originality requires tradition” can be used as a definition for the concept of *praxis*. In fact, the easiest way to understand *praxis* is as a reflection on how the *poiesis* (originality) was informed by the *techne*

(tradition), a means of examining both the application and the manipulation of creative techniques. It is through this reflection that new knowledge (*episteme*) is evoked. To make the concept of reaching *episteme* clearer to the students, I explain it in this way:

- *Techne* – the art form, and all its manipulations that have added to the craft.
- *Poiesis* – the production of an object, in this case, a piece of creative writing.
- *Praxis* – external to the object created, it is the process of unfolding how the *poiesis* both conforms to and challenges the accepted *techne*.
- *Episteme* – articulating how the piece contributes to a new understanding of *techne*.

To help students through this process I have created a journaling technique (SOAR journal) that leads students through a critical reading exercise to inform their own craftsmanship. The goal of this journal is two-fold: firstly, to get students to “read like a writer” and secondly, to implement narrative techniques gleaned from the prescribed texts in their own writing. The SOAR journal seeks to combine *techne* and *poiesis*, assisting students toward a more holistic understanding of the creative process. The SOAR journal not only guides students through a more critical and creative understanding of the text, but also allows for them to trial the observed techniques. SOAR stands for:

- S – Summary of one section of text
- O – Observation of devices
- A – Analysis of impact
- R – Response (creative)

Firstly, students **summarize** one section of the text that resonates and reveals either character, setting, conflict, situation, thematic preoccupation or anything else that they find relevant. The second aspect asks students to **observe** the devices in the chosen section. They must identify and examine the narrative, literary, and figurative devices used within the section chosen, using actual examples from the text. Thirdly, students are asked to **analyze** the impact of the techniques discussed in the observation section. In this section, students are to consider the function of the techniques observed in regards to the construction of the narrative as a whole. The observation and the analysis together help students to analyze the *techne* of any given piece. Lastly, students

get a chance to implement these observed techniques in their own creative **response**. Students can manipulate the narrative frame, but need to use the techniques in a new and innovative manner. The final stage moves students into *poiesis*, a process of exploring techniques through the making of art.

The following example of a SOAR journal is on *The Count of Monte Cristo* (Dumas 1845):

**Section:** After Dantes meets fellow inmate, Faria, he begins to piece together the plot and ultimate betrayal that led to his unjust imprisonment. Unbeknownst to Dantes he had been framed by two men who he thought he could trust and another man who was paranoid and would do anything to protect his father. With this new information Dantes now has a renewed vigour to try to escape his prison and seek revenge on these three men who have, in his mind, destroyed his life. Favourite sentence from this section: "Dantes now began to see clearly, and many details which had been incomprehensible to him up to this moment now began to assume their real significance" (Dumas 99).

**Observation:** This section is dialogue driven, with Faria using a deductive questioning technique to assist Dantes in determining who arranged his imprisonment. The tension in the scene is held through the dramatic irony, the reader knows the truth of Dantes' imprisonment, and watches as the curtain is slowly drawn back in Dantes' mind. There is the use of analogy when Dantes asks Faria to "turn over the pages of my past". There is a metaphor when Dantes says "the world is filled with tigers and crocodile". There are two main alliterations: "poor short-sighted simpleton" and "invite his fellow sufferer to share his supper". There is also a poignant simile in "the dark cell of the prison that was to him like a living grave".

**Analysis:** The use of dialogue driven narrative in this section adds to the tension created by the dramatic irony. The reader is aware that the truth is about to be revealed to Dantes, but as his mind continues to reject the possibility that his friends betrayed him, the moment of realization is both prolonged and intensified. This scene provides verisimilitude for Dantes' dramatic character change. The author initially portrays Dantes as a naïve and idealistic young man. Through the use of figurative language, like the metaphor about tigers and

crocodiles, the author is able to show, without telling the reader, that Dantes is beginning to view the darker side of humanity. A new Dantes is emerging in prison; vengeful, angry, embittered, and determined. The process of his character change is necessary in this scene, as after his escape Dantes will seek revenge on those who have betrayed him.

**Creative Response:** (I am exploring the use of dialogue driven narrative and using the deductive questioning technique)

*The red and green lights swirled as Jenny and Lauren slithered down the spiral staircase.*

*"I have always loved how the lights dance on the wall like fairies." Jenny stole a glance at her sister, whose face was set in a determined scowl. "I know he won't be here this year, but at least mum has kept to tradition," Jenny said.*

*"Some celebration this is going to be."*

*"You know it wouldn't kill you to try to be a little understanding. Nobody said this would be easy, but we should try. For mum."*

*Lauren stopped on the first landing and folded her arms. "What is your fondest memory of this day?"*

*Jenny turned to face her sister, rejecting the building memory. "Dad playing the guitar and making up silly songs." "Who's going to do that now?"*

*Jenny shrugged as her foot dropped onto the second landing. "Of course it is going to be different, but that doesn't mean it is going to be horrible. Perhaps we can create new traditions, new memories."*

*"Without Dad? How would that make him feel? Oh, hey, Dad, sorry you weren't here with us this year, but we had a great time without you," Lauren said in a mock-playful tone.*

*"Okay, fine. It's going to suck. We might as well just go back to bed and..." Jenny stopped as a familiar sound filled the stairwell.*

*Lauren and Jenny exchanged knowing glances as the doleful notes of a guitar tickled their ears.*

*"Dad," they said in unison and scurried down the stairs.*

This is the first year that I have been using the SOAR journal in my Creativity and Literature course, and already the students are benefitting from the fusing of *techne* and *poiesis*. Students initially commented on the difficulty of the task, one saying "I've never investigated the *how* (techniques) and *why* (impact) of a text, only the

*what* (plot). This has really opened my eyes to new possibilities, but has also been quite uncomfortable” (Stewart 2016). After the newness of the assignment was reconciled, and new examples were offered, students began to achieve beyond expectations. One student commented: “The SOAR journals have been amazing for developing my creative technique and critical understanding of craft. I’ve actually implemented this same strategy in my other creative writing courses” (Crowley 2016). I have maintained an almost 90 percent participation rate with the new journal format, many opting to do two or three journals for each piece. One student, who continually achieves beyond expectation, stated: “I think the SOAR journal is a fantastic concept. It is helping me guide my own reading and should be in more creative writing classes as a way of building towards the critical reflection of creative practice” (Milroy 2016). These results are encouraging, and while I knew the assessment would be challenging, I also knew that students could rise to the challenge and achieve at a more technical and practical level. I am excited and anxious to see how these journals impact on their final creative artefacts.

The SOAR journal grew from a desire to find an overt way to depict the subconscious act of creation—creation is always re-creation. The journal assessment seeks to combine analysis of technical method and craft with the practical application of these techniques through the making of an artefact. It is the reflection (*praxis*) of these two aspects (the *techne* and the *poiesis*) of creative writing that leads to new knowledge (*episteme*) within the creative writing discipline. Reading and analysis of classical texts serves to widen the technical and practical scope of emerging creative writers and provides a path toward new discovery and innovation.

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# The significance of creative writing workshops for teachers

Daniel Xerri



## Introduction

In order for teachers of English in primary and secondary education to teach creative writing effectively, it is paramount that they position themselves as writers. Even though this might sound like common

sense, in reality some teachers find it difficult because they have not embraced the habit of writing the very genres they expect their students to write in class. Hence, creative writing is something they might teach, on account of curricular requirements, but not necessarily practise on a personal and professional level. This paradox implies that the teaching of creative writing might be perceived as a chore that they have to perform rather than as an activity that they heartily enjoy. Brooks (2007) affirms that “a teacher’s job is to reach students and support their growth. Sometimes that work may involve the teacher sharing a personal experience or passion as a way of cultivating a student’s experiences” (189). In earlier work I describe how I engaged my students in creative writing by producing poems together with them via a shared writing activity (Xerri 2011) and an extension activity (Xerri 2012). Such activities communicate a teacher’s enthusiasm for creative writing and have the potential to make young people perceive it as a democratic process that they too can engage in.

## Teachers’ attitudes towards creative writing

A negative attitude on the part of teachers has the potential to impinge on their students’ perception and

enjoyment of creative writing. As a result, further generations of teachers are driven to adopt a negative stance toward creative writing because at school their teachers were not enthusiastic about it. This vicious circle engenders a situation whereby creative writing continues to be considered as an activity that can only be engaged in by a small group of individuals who are born with the ability to write creatively. It helps to entrench the belief that creative writing is difficult to practise and should ideally be tackled only for curricular purposes within the confines of the classroom, rather than used as a vehicle for personal and artistic expression in the world beyond.

One of the reasons for such a problematic situation is that teachers lack adequate support in positioning themselves as creative writers. Gallavan, Bowles and Young (2007) report that “teacher educators voice apprehension about candidates’ abilities, much less their expertise, to model and support writing as forms of expression and reflection essential for learning and schooling as well as working and living” (61). The challenges indicated by teachers include lack of confidence as writers, poor histories as writers, lack of meaningful professional development, and lack of time (Street and Stang 2008). Enabling teachers to develop the necessary knowledge, skills and beliefs to ingrain creative writing as part of their professional identity is crucial if creative writing is to flourish amongst young people. A study by Harward et al. (2014) shows that effective writing teachers “considered the writing process essential and perceived themselves as good writers. These dispositions affected the ways they approached writing in their classroom and scaffolded their students’ writing experiences” (215). The act of engaging in creative writing functions “as a self-

empowering tool to achieve particular social positioning and hence self-esteem" (Zhao 2014: 452). Providing teachers with the opportunity to participate in creative writing workshops as part of pre-service teacher education and continuing professional development is a means of aiding them to step into the role of creative writing teachers with confidence and competence.

### Writing workshops within teacher education and development

The writers' workshop was institutionalized at the University of Iowa in 1936, since when creative writing has become widely recognized as a discipline. According to Glover (2010), "It is not a big claim to say that the idea and practices of the writers' workshop (or writers' group) are at the centre of the discipline and its pedagogy" (123). Writing workshops are considered fundamental in enabling those who want to write professionally to acquire the competences needed for such a role. But besides professional writers, writing workshops have the potential to assist primary and secondary school teachers who might be expected to engage students in creative writing activities. The idea that only professional writers can teach creative writing is a mistaken one, as it is based on the belief that creative writing is a special subject with a special set of requirements for those who teach it. Such a belief would make it entirely distinct from all other subjects taught at school. For Thomson (2013), the issue to consider is not whether it is possible to teach creative writing but whether "a published writer is qualified per se to teach creative writing. Unless they are willing to learn how to teach alongside their development as a writer, I think they aren't" (52). By extension, this means that those who teach creative writing to young people in primary and secondary schools but are not professional writers might need support to position themselves as writers.

There is plenty of evidence attesting to the idea that writing workshops have the potential to help teachers develop the competencies and identity of a writer. According to Elbaz-Luwisch (2002), writing workshops constitute "a space not only for thinking aloud and sharing, but also for engaging in inquiry and restorying, a space in which the diversity of voices that enable teachers to express their concerns, hopes, and fears can be heard" (425). The fact that a writing workshop provides teachers with the tools to hone their writing as

well as an audience for their writing is significant, given that "A writer in any rhetorical situation needs to understand the content of her idea, conceptualize her audience, and work through a writing process in order to write effectively" (Magnifico 2010: 181). A writing workshop "challenges educators to reflect on their writer identities and how those might translate into their writing instruction" (Vetter 2011: 195). One way of doing this is by asking teachers "to represent metaphorically what a writer is to them. They could compare that representation with the kind of writer identity they foster through instruction with their students" (Vetter 2011: 195). Enabling them to develop the identity of a writer is significant, given that most writing workshops for teachers are based on the "hypothesis [...] that when teachers embrace the professional identity of writer, their practices as teachers of writing undergo a transformation that enhances the experience of and performance in the writing of their students" (Locke et al. 2011: 273). The fact that students also reap the benefits of teachers participating in a writing workshop is a powerful case for its incorporation in teacher education and development.

By making writing workshops an intrinsic component of teacher education and development, teachers and their students will be able to engage in creative writing activities more effectively. According to Fearn and Farnan (2007), "There is but one reason for professional education in writing: to ensure that the students of our pre-service teachers and those who participate in our professional development write better as a result. Nothing else matters" (27). A writing workshop for pre-service teachers would allow them to "rediscover writing and have multiple experiences as writers to draw upon when they are in the classroom. They need opportunities to write for themselves, to live the same curriculum and experiences they can later use with their own students" (Morgan 2010: 352). For similar reasons, writing workshops might also need to become a staple feature of teacher development. Given the fact that "professional development appears to be more prevalent and influential, it seems imperative to have professional opportunities for teachers to engage in writing themselves" (McCarthy and Ro 2011: 292). Studies show that professional development is cited as being the most influential factor for effective teachers of writing (Harward et al. 2014; Simmerman et al. 2012). Besides boosting their confidence (Locke et al. 2011),

writing workshops as part of professional development also help to change teachers' writing pedagogy. For example, Levitt et al. (2014) describe how, after participating in a yearlong writing workshop, teachers moved away from teaching writing separately from content and from the process approach and "chose to adopt a strong skills-oriented approach to teaching writing, especially with struggling students" (259). It seems clear that writing workshops need to form part of teachers' professional learning both at pre- and in-service levels.

### Conclusion

Teachers and young people should not be encouraged to foster the belief that creative writing is something exceptional that can only be engaged in by exceptional individuals. As shown in the case of poetry writing (Xerri 2013a), such a belief has the capacity to deter teachers and students from seeing themselves as capable of writing creatively. If it is deemed desirable that an increasing number of young people have recourse to creative writing as a means of developing their writing ability and discovering an avenue for personal expression, then it is imperative that teachers position themselves as creative practitioners (Xerri 2013b). This is due to the fact that teachers are role models for their students and their enthusiasm (or lack thereof) for creative writing is infectious. Hence, it is necessary to break the vicious circle of teachers who fail to inspire students to enjoy creative writing and who subsequently fail to inspire their own students once some of them embark on a teaching career. This has to start by supporting teachers to develop the required knowledge, skills and beliefs to engage in creative writing.

As discussed above, the incorporation of writing workshops into teacher education and development can play a vital role in delivering support. Besides equipping teachers with the competences required to write creatively, writing workshops have the potential to increase teachers' confidence and help them to develop the belief that creative writing can be engaged in for its intrinsic worth. Just as young people are taught to read fiction, poetry and drama for the sake of personal enrichment, they can also be taught to write such genres for the same purpose. In fact, McVey (2008) maintains that "Writers (and teachers) in education should work to promote both reading and a love of reading, and writing

as pleasure and process, not just a means to an end" (293). Writing workshops are highly significant for teachers as they help them to position themselves creatively, both inside and outside the classroom. Writing workshops can contribute to the growth of a culture of creativity amongst educators and the young people they are tasked with inspiring.

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# I just want to go see my camels!

## Creative use of drama and narratives to involve FGM-affected women in research design

Sarah Penny



### Background

I have been working with arts for social change for the last five years, specifically using dramatherapy and creative writing in an approach that I call *Hadithi ya Afrika* ('stories from Africa' in kiSwahili).

Much of this work has focused on supporting organic community refusal of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), most recently with the Somali diaspora in London. Papers about two of the previous *Hadithi ya Afrika* projects have appeared in *Writing in Education*, about the pilot project in Cape Town in 2011, and the first of the FGM refusal projects, which I ran in Kenya in 2014 (Penny 2011, 2014).

Last year saw an exciting development; I was approached by the Health Experiences Research Group (HERG) from the Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences at Oxford University to collaborate with them on user involvement to inform future research. HERG uses social science-informed, qualitative methods to understand health experiences. They interview people about what it's like to live with a health condition. Their research highlights how personal narratives can support other people experiencing the same condition, as well as inform policy and improve services. Their studies are disseminated to the public and professionals on [www.healthtalk.org](http://www.healthtalk.org). The group has been running for over 15 years and the disciplinary backgrounds of HERG researchers are varied, including sociology, anthropology, psychology, and social policy.

HERG approached me because they were considering how they could adapt their methods for research and outputs with people affected by FGM, and wanted to involve women and their families, as well as healthcare staff, in planning a new research proposal. They were holding a series of discussions through the autumn of 2015 and early 2016, to co-design both a research process that would be acceptable to participants, and outputs that would be useful to people affected by FGM in the UK. In healthcare, this kind of involvement is commonly known as "patient and public involvement" or PPI. Good practice guidance for increasing diversity and inclusion in PPI suggests going to people in community groups rather than expecting them to come to a university or NHS premises; working with trusted intermediaries; and using creative methods.

Lisa Hinton and Sharon Dixon from HERG were concerned to develop sensitive research with FGM-affected women. This was familiar territory from my own work with Somalis. Somali women are raised in a very patriarchal culture. There is a huge premium on cultural concepts around a woman's honour and the reverse of honour, shame. In addition, Somali women, if raised in Somalia, are extremely likely to have been brutally genitally cut as young children, and extremely unlikely to have ever discussed or really processed the impact of this experience. Against this background, it is almost impossible for a Somali woman to be identified physically on camera in the first place, let alone to speak openly about her experiences. The women I worked with (and men for that matter) were not even prepared to use anonymous filming techniques. The only way in which I have been able to move their testimony out of

the workshop rooms and into the national refusal campaigns, is by podcasting the material.

The Somali activists who have spoken out openly on national television about their abuse, women like Leyla Hussein and Nimco Ali, are extraordinarily brave and influential. But because they are regarded by the Somali community as so “out there” their influence on ordinary Somali women is tempered. One of my Somali colleagues once remarked to me:

*Leyla does FGM for the British because she informs and educates them. But to change their behaviour, Somalis need to learn from people that they see as properly Somali.*

HERG had heard that I had worked extensively with the Somali community under the auspices of the Midaye Somali Development Network. And out of that work, they had been able to gather a body of stories and testimony about women’s experiences of undergoing FGM, and also about moving away from FGM as a community. Initially HERG wanted to explore (as part of their PPI) whether an arts-based approach might in the first instance extend to facilitating a discussion of the key issues that new research would need to explore and what resources would be most useful. They were also interested in exploring if, further down the line, it would be an acceptable way of collecting narratives of both living with the health consequences of FGM, and using health services as an FGM-survivor, also of exploring how those narratives might best be delivered. Making these resources, and making them effective, is essential because, although FGM-affected women are often very resistant to using health services, because of the impact and ongoing complications of genital cutting, it is critical that ways are found of helping them overcome their reluctance.

### **Towards a solution**

I suggested that a good starting point for exploring some of these ideas would be to resume work with the group of Somali women from Midaye with whom I had worked previously. These women had the advantage of already being very familiar with working within an arts-based approach, and also of having already – and at some length – reflected on their FGM and its effect on their lives. They are committed FGM activists, but also have identical or similar profiles to the women whose

needs HERG seeks to meet; they are African-born, and mainly illiterate and unable to speak English.

Another advantage was that Midaye had already held its own FGM forums (Pirie 2015), in which community members and professionals were invited to talk about their experiences of dealing with both FGM prevention and FGM-related service delivery in the British context. All of our working group had been part of that experience. A detailed evaluation and learning report was drawn up following the forums. The report noted that when women spoke of their own experiences of using health services they identified that both the process of personally coming to repudiate FGM, and the tenor of much of the legislation and policy discussion, had led them to feel ashamed that they had had FGM, guilty, humiliated and set apart from British society. The women felt they were treated insensitively by health professionals at all levels – being humiliated, put on display for colleagues, referred to inappropriate services or told their pain was insignificant.

On the other hand, when professionals spoke of their experiences of offering health services, they identified that – because they lacked cultural awareness – they felt unsure and unable to understand their patients and build relationships with them. Both professionals and community members identified as a desirable outcome further training for professionals that would raise their awareness of FGM, but would be culturally sensitive to the background and experiences of communities, with professionals identified as needing to become more “culturally competent”.

The long-term aim is to develop a comprehensive resource using qualitative research that is underpinned by gathering testimony from communities, through the use of creative writing and dramatherapy, but also including medical advice on FGM and research into specific FGM practices in specific communities. The aim of the workshops in November was to test how best to run a “resource-making” workshop, learning valuable lessons about the process from a group of FGM-affected women who had previous experience of arts-based work, before moving the workshops out into a wider and less familiarized community setting.

### Structure and content

We ran the workshops over two days. With a new group I would always have a dramatherapist present throughout the workshops. Because this group of woman was already used to the techniques and I knew there was strong group cohesion and support established, I used the techniques myself, with the dramatherapist who had initially worked with the women supervising me remotely. I set up the structure according to the principles that are now entrenched with *Hadithi ya Afrika*. On the first day there is an initial discussion so that everyone present has a chance to ask and answer questions and fully understand the process. Then comes an ice-breaker, or an introduction to dramatherapy and creative writing work, if it is a fresh group, followed by the focus work. On the final day there is a chance for evaluation and feedback from the group, before story-sharing and closure. My colleagues at Midaye, Filsan Ali and Idil Hassan, had discussed with myself, Sharon and Lisa in a preliminary meeting the issues they felt were in greatest need of being opened up for discussion. But I felt that, before we looked at such intimate topics, it was important to contextualize the discussion within a wider conversation about being Somali. So for first day I geared the topics under focus toward a psychosocial dimension.

- 1) Being a Somali woman: cultural expectations around a woman's body from Somalis.
- 2) Being seen as a victim: when health professionals see that you have had FGM.
- 3) Being seen as a perpetrator: when health professionals think you might cut your daughter because you were cut.

And on the second day we looked specifically at dealing with difficult menstruation, accessing maternity services, and contraception and smear testing.

### Step over the line: levelling the playing field between "researcher" and "researched"

A core issue in trying to involve marginalized communities is the power imbalance between the person organizing the event and participants. It is very easy to

arrive at a situation where participants are expected to disclose all kinds of personal experiences, but the organizer has complete privacy and doesn't share anything at all. On the second day of workshops we had the Somali women, Midaye staff, myself, and Lisa and a research assistant, Keira Pratt-Boyden from HERG. The HERG team were present to run the PPI question session at the end of the workshop, but I felt it was a good idea for them to be present all morning so that the women had a chance to get to know them. Thus it was a group with a wide and disparate range of life experiences. After we had warmed up, we went into a drama game called "Step over the line", with every person in the room joining in. The whole group had to form a straight line on one side of the room and visualize an imaginary line in the middle of the room running parallel to the human line. Then they were asked a range of questions - if the answer was "yes" they had to step over the line; if "no" they stayed where they were; and if "maybe" or "none of your business" they stood on the line. I started with innocuous questions about domestic and everyday things and built slowly towards the theme: "if you feel afraid to go the doctor"; "if the memory of your first period is a painful memory"; "if you feel you were treated as a special, difficult case when you gave birth." Because everyone in the room was physically expressing their experience, it broke down barriers, so we were all established in each other's frame of reference as women with a field of shared experience around women's health issues.

All of the working group women shared during "Step over the line", that their periods became a lot easier after marriage, because on the marriage night their husbands penetrated their FGM stitching and widened the hole, which, traditionally in Somali infibulations, should not be bigger than a needle after the FGM and before marriage. So their menstrual fluid, which could previously only come out one drop at a time, could now flow more rapidly.

One of the women enlarged on this when it came to topic discussion:

*I used to stand in the toilet all day, and if any drip came out I would wash it away with water. All day waiting for a drip, and wash wash wash! Oh my goodness! People noticed I was going around the house and through the gate and they said: "What is wrong with her these days?" That was my first*



*period. After marriage, that period was less sore than the first period because I was stitched so tight after my FGM that even to urinate was difficult. But when I got married my husband opened me up.*

The women observed that periods are different for different people.

*Some people only have a little bit of pain. But for some people it is terrible.*

*Because I had FGM, when I was a little girl my periods were really terribly painful. I was happier when my husband opened me; it made the pain less.*

For the British-born women in the room, including one British-born Somali who is uncut, this was not an experience they shared, but when some-one offered “Although my daughter has not had FGM, she still gets very sick every time she has a period”, there was nodding and agreement across all the women. “Step over the line” established a precedent that although the non-Somalis were there to learn, they were also there to share.

### Using tableaux: a difficult birth experience

In a tableau, participants make still images with their bodies to represent a scene. The scene can then be brought to life. I used tableaux in the workshops to enable the participants to explore memory. The primary conceptual tool of tableaux work is psychodrama, a form of therapy conceived and developed by Jacob Moreno that uses guided dramatic action to explore dilemmas or issues. It is a useful tool in a group that already has some proficiency in drama, and where there is an established level of trust in the group. Tableaux are also very effective in creating narrative memory as the participants are able to be in role, as themselves at the time the event happened, but also out of role, as their now-selves, remembering and reflecting. The dramatherapist Renée Emunah wrote:

*Reliving events (rather than talking about them only) accesses the sensations that one experienced at the time the event took place. The enactment revives suppressed emotions. [...] The defense mechanism of intellectualization (or other forms of distancing) so common when talking about an emotional experience is circumvented. (1994: 43)*

One of the participants offered that she wanted to tell the story of the first time she gave birth in the UK. She told us that there were two people in her memory, herself and her midwife, so we created a “freeze-frame” tableau with the storyteller in the labour ward as herself, and another participant invited to be the mid-wife. Then I asked the tableau to come to life.

The storyteller shared how she ran away from hospital during her labour.

*I just thought what can I do. I CAN'T stay here any longer. I have to go to my home. Because when I went to hospital I thought the baby would take quick but it took long. And the midwife just didn't come. Every time I wanted her, I had to go and see where she was. And I was tired, so I said to myself – just go back home. They told me I was only four centimeters, and I thought, six centimeters to go. I can't stay here. Because there was no food and no-one to look after me. So I looked around and thought – there is no-one here. I'll go home and I'll come back just before the baby is born. So I went home and had some food and a drink and after two hours when I started to feel pushing I went back to hospital with a taxi. The midwife said “Where did you go!” and I said “Just home” and she said “Ah! You're killing your baby.” I said “But no-one was helping me. I was sitting alone there in the room and no-one come to me. And I was tired and I wanted to eat something.” So she said: “Let's look your baby how far.” And then she said I was eight open. The baby came after 20 minutes. And they just went and put the baby on the table. But here [pointing to groin] they didn't put me anything.*

The storyteller was clearly angry at this memory. She was invited to express her anger directly to the midwife.

*You put me in that room and said: “Stay there – I am coming back.” But you didn't come back. And no-one gave me anything and I was so alone and so hungry. So I went home.*

The midwife was invited to put across her point of view. She said that she had checked the storyteller, and she was only four centimetres and needed to wait for attention. I asked the storyteller to tell the midwife how she would have liked to be treated.

*You should have looked after me, and checked the baby and bought me something to eat. You should have told me, the baby will take its time but we will look after you. Why did you*

*say you would come back, but you never came back? I was more than one hour on my own. This was my first child delivered in the UK. The older ones were when I lived in Holland and it was much, much better there. And why did you put my baby on that table? And why did you leave me with nothing to cover me. Because my blood was going all around. Because of my injury [referring to the FGM] I need to be cleaned and covered after a baby. But nothing of that happened. [Getting more angry] They didn't cover me! I was naked! And my blood was going like water [makes a pumping noise]. When I looked on the floor, I saw my blood everywhere under and behind the bed. But I couldn't reach the bell. So I cried: “Help me! Help me!” But nobody came. I thought I was going to die. Then the girl came to bath the baby, and she saw all the blood, and she ran out and some people came back. Not the first midwife – I never saw her again. It was another midwife. And then they covered me. And they said “Sorry! Sorry!” And they kept coming back and saying sorry and checking on me in the night. But I cried and I cried. I couldn't accept the sorry. So four years later, the next time I was going to have a baby, I decided to have that baby at home. Everyone said to me: “You shouldn't complain. You are fine and your daughter is fine.” And I didn't know how to complain about it. But that day – they killed me. Afterwards I was so shocked. And I cried for a long time about it. I felt I didn't want to ever go to hospital again.*

The midwife was invited to talk with the storyteller again. She apologized and asked for forgiveness. The storyteller, as her present self, said she was satisfied with the outcome and we closed the tableau.

### **Somali experience in the UK: being seen as both victim and perpetrator**

Until very recently, FGM in the UK was not prominent as a national public concern. But in 2014 the Department of Health mandated the monthly collection of prevalence data on women who had been previously identified as having had FGM, as well as newly identified victims. This was replaced in April 2015, by the FGM enhanced dataset ([www.hscic.gov.uk/fgm](http://www.hscic.gov.uk/fgm)). Clinicians in England are now required to record a long list of information on any patient with FGM, including her name and her NHS number, and send this data quarterly to the Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC). In October 2015 another new law came into effect, which decreed that all regulated health and social care professionals and teachers in England and

Wales have a mandatory duty to report to the police cases of FGM in under 18s which they have identified in the course of their professional work.

For the women, this change in British attitude has started to make their daily lives uncomfortable and they resent it. One woman explained:

*Yes, it's true, we Somali women who live here had FGM in our country. Everyone had FGM, and it was a bad experience, and very painful, and it was done to us at 7, 8, 9 – at that age you are very aware of the pain. Then we get married and we have to go through pain again, and then we have babies, and pain again. So all that pain and now this new law is bringing the memories of all the pain back to us. But we will never, ever do this to our children. We went through a lot of pain in our lives and we will never do that to our daughters. But the stigma is there. They think because we had it done, if we have a baby girl we will do it to our daughter.*

The women said they particularly hate mandatory reporting because it makes them feel stigmatized and discriminated against. A participant described her reaction:

*The police have to stop harassing people and following them around. There is already a good system in place to support mothers of young babies, with the health visitors. Train them and let them talk to us about FGM. But not police and social workers – that people from non-FGM backgrounds wouldn't have. There is no need for that.*

An experience which all the women had gone through, or had close family go through, was being stopped at the airport if they had a young girl in the family group. Another participant said of these routine interventions:

*The airport is so bad! They have a list. Sudanese, Somali – if you are on their list they just call you out! They're thinking – gudniin gudniin gudniin!. But I'm thinking – I just want to go see my camels!*

#### Where to from here ...

When we asked the women for feedback at the close of the workshops, they told us that ordinarily it felt odd and difficult for them to suddenly be asked a lot of questions. But within the circle, they felt it was okay. "We understand why we are here and we are together."

What this involvement event has suggested is that women want to see research that can be used to impact on professional behaviour and awareness, and help increase understanding of their culture. We would like to apply for a grant to put together a larger project, to create a resource that could educate health professionals about the history and experiences of Somali FGM-affected women under their care.

I have also realized that my role, not only in FGM-work, but in all the social change work I am involved with, needs to be informed as much by proper therapeutic structures as it does by creative writing strategies. It's not enough anymore to be simply the writer on the projects. I am working with very vulnerable people and that carries with it a great responsibility. So I have decided to go back to university in September and study the MSc in Using Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes (CWTP), with the Metanoia Institute. The MSc is a three-year part-time degree, which prepares students for the challenges and demands of working in the growing field of CWTP. I am really excited and enthusiastic about this training, and how I can use the learning to influence and enhance both this and future work with communities.

#### Note

1. The Somali term for Type III excision and infubulation.

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*Sarah Penny was born and grew up in South Africa. She lectures in Creative Writing at Brunel University. Sarah is a novelist and an activist for social change. She heads an initiative called "Seeds of the Future", which uses podcast testimony to encourage practicing communities to transition away from FGM. She has published three books with Penguin South Africa and has a novel due out with Valley Press in 2017. She is a Winston Churchill 2013 Fellow and a Thomson Reuters Community Champion. The health research work was funded by Thomson Reuters and the Wellcome Trust.*

# “Donde Estan?”

## Translations from the dark, Argentina, 1976–79, for Robert Cox

### Robert Hull



Robert Cox

In 1976 a coup by the Argentine military opened the door into a seven years long nightmare of gruesome political oppression. The “Dirty War” that lasted till 1984 claimed thousands of lives.

Robert Cox, editor then of the English language *Buenos Aires Herald* (founded in 1896) is internationally celebrated now as editor of the one newspaper heroically to report, under Cox’s name, on the tortures, murders and disappearances that made the times “a vortex of horror”, in Cox’s phrase. He did so by covering legal actions in court where families of the “disappeared” filed writs of habeas corpus. He somehow got away with it. People survived because he wrote about them.

Amazingly, he and his family survived – until 1979, when Robert Cox left Argentina, reluctantly, just before Christmas, driven into exile by threats to his family. He had even had sight of the plans drawn up for his execution.

I met Robert Cox once, a decade or more later, at the house of his sister, a life-long friend. Then in 2012 I was looking for South American poetry written under various military dictatorships. I thought I could perhaps ask him, through her, whether he could suggest any poetry of the “Dirty War” years that might be worth translating – for submission to *Modern Poetry in Translation*. The subsequent email correspondence – very helpful indeed on his side – led to my sending him my *On Portsmouth Station* and *Pavarotti of the Sidings*,

collections published by Beafred in 2008 and 2012, and more pertinently here, to my receiving a copy of his son David Cox’s *Dirty Secrets, Dirty War*, a scarifying account of what it was like – not least for the Cox family – to live through those times.

The Argentine translations were put to one side, and instead this sequence of short poems was written, deriving from my shocked reading of David Cox’s narrative. The sequence was sent to MPT, who had in fact for some while – as I omitted to remember – been taking no “original” stuff, only translations strictly speaking.

In the meantime I had the warmest sort of words from Cox about the collections I’d sent him. I wondered if I dare, therefore, send him the sequence of “Dirty War” epigrams. I feared their being intrusive, an act of trespass, or likely to prise up things best left alone, or even simply artistically pointless. I made enquiries through his sister as to the tactfulness or otherwise of sending them, and was assured I should. I did, but with apprehension. His response:

*I have just read your extraordinarily insightful word images that capture those terrible times precisely. Maud and Rob and I experienced them together for the first time as I read your words and we were very moved and very silent.*

That version didn’t include the section about the “Mothers of Plaza de Mayo” walking protest in “non-demonstration”. He suggested it was important to have something about them, so crucial was their protest and their movement generally.

The bodies washed up  
on the beach of the sea-side resort  
were and are  
and for the foreseeable future will be  
Asian sailors.

\*\*

What do they do  
the police patrolling parks  
when they find couples kissing?

put electrodes to lips?  
burn lovers' hands with cigars?  
press down a thousand pillows  
to suffocate the grass?

Something like that –  
and complete the job  
by machine-gunning benches  
fountains birds ants.

\*\*

At a party, relating the details of a raid –  
armed men with stockings over their heads  
forcing their way in –  
elegant military chaps,  
responding, faintly amused,  
"That was us."

\*\*

Sending two squads  
on the same night  
to raid the same apartment.

Not a night at the opera  
or the circus but  
an ordinary night  
in the 70s  
in Buenos Aires.

\*\*

Other achievements included  
arresting a woman  
who looked like the wife  
of the journalist alleged

to have let an apartment  
thought to have sheltered  
a nun suspected  
of ministering to the poor.

\*\*

It is not permitted to allude  
to any reference  
that anyone might have made  
or not made  
to the subversive events  
that recently have not taken place.

\*\*

When you walk into a restaurant  
and people start to leave,  
it means you may be an enemy  
of monsters.

When you walk into a restaurant  
and people linger hesitantly,  
drawing out their meal unnecessarily,  
it means you may be one.

\*\*

A name listed  
a story written down  
are acts of retrieval  
that can't be dropped  
from helicopters in the dark  
into the dark.

\*\*

Unknown  
amongst human social skills,  
or seldom encountered till now –

grieving murderers,  
respectfully dressed  
in sharp military gear  
at victims' funerals.

\*\*

An ethical question might be put  
 as to whether any one sort of monster  
 performing any one sort of torture,  
 or indeed any one sort of torture  
 (Nazi Argentinian NKVD  
 KGB Mossad Spanish Portuguese  
 American English Israeli other)  
 could, by a semi-thousandth  
 of a sliver of a shaving  
 of motive (e.g. "the battle we are waging..."  
 etc.) be considered more acceptable  
 morally than any other.

A question to be put  
 by a monster.

\*\*

The reason the guard said,  
 "We have a nice programme today",  
 is that wherever there's torture,  
 music is needed.

It reminds those under interrogation  
 there were better times.  
 It's usually best played loud

so those under interrogation  
 can enjoy it despite whatever  
 sounds they may be emitting.

\*\*

In the vote on the question  
 as to whether there were too many

*Jews*

in the country club,  
 Mr Rosenheim and Mr Schapiro  
 agreed there were.

\*\*

The boy's eye  
 at the peep-hole  
 for hours  
 watching the man,

the girl's,  
 waiting  
 for the stones at the gate  
 to blow up.

\*\*

Four sisters, ten others  
 standing there  
 standing is  
 demonstrating  
 so arm in arm  
 they walked  
 fourteen mothers –  
 April 30th 1977 –  
 round the square  
 demonstrating  
 they were not  
 demonstrating  
 only walking  
 round the square  
 afterwards hundreds  
 walking armed  
 with white scarves  
 lost children  
 a refusal  
 to hear silence.

\*\*\*

"Do you know that people  
 are being taken out of their homes  
 at 3 in the morning  
 and not coming back?"

"What nice shoes you have."

The most "loco" monsters  
 sent messages.

One in red, for the children,  
 was casually strewn  
 across the front garden  
 in pet rabbit.

\*\*\*

"We didn't know  
we'd say 'We didn't know',  
knowing we knew."

\*\*\*

There was a time, a place  
when "speaking" in English  
translated into Spanish  
as "non hablante".

But even "non hablante"  
was a whisper,  
like a leaf scratching at a window,  
so "silencio" was substituted;  
but then that word  
became a muffled cry in an alleyway,  
which editors had to erase.

But that only meant that the word "absence"  
was even more clearly enunciated  
in English  
on the stunned air.

\*\*

"Desparecido" –  
with the added suffix  
that turns it transitive,

in English chiming with "despair",  
"homicide", "disappear",  
translatable by

"about 30,000".

*Robert Hull's seventh collection of poems, Later, was published by Beafred in 2014, and his third for children, High Tide, by Salt in 2010. He has written extensively for children, and published three books for teachers, the most recent (2010) from David Fulton: Poetry, from Reading to Writing, A Classroom Guide for Ages 7-11.*

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## REVIEWS

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Jeri Kroll, Andrew Melrose and Jen Webb (eds), *Old and New, Tried and Untried: Creativity and Research in the 21st Century University*. Champaign, IL: Common Ground Publishing, 2016. ISBN 9781612298405. £40, 160pp, paperback.

In the past half century there has been an explosion of new subjects at university level, and a consequent demand from opponents of this “invasion” for these subjects to justify themselves as independent and rigorous academic disciplines. That process of critique has been especially vocal in respect of new degrees in the creative arts, and this book on Creative Writing could well become the model for other texts in defence of theatre arts, visual arts etc. Practitioners across the spectrum of creative arts in the university sector will certainly find much to applaud and to be encouraged by within its pages. Not least among the merits of this collection is its timely discussion of the establishment of Creative Writing as a discipline which has now matured to include not only undergraduate programmes but also higher degrees which rank quite properly alongside other doctorates. Moreover, it is timely because, unless Creative Writing is taken seriously, it will not be funded, either through the establishment of academic posts or through research grants, and its practitioners will not gain promotion within the university system.

This volume, which has contributions from nine academics from departments of Creative Writing, seven of whom are based in Australia and two in the UK, addresses fundamental issues about the nature of the research which underpins Creative Writing and the reason why such research has to be there. The contributors interrogate such binaries as research-active versus practice-active and the researcher versus the practitioner, binaries that are proved to be illusory and unhelpful. The writers draw upon their experience as creators, teachers and supervisors, presenting examples from their own research and that of their students, and articulating possible models for future best practice.

The impetus for this book came from two conferences in 2014, and further input has been sought from other contributors since that event. What that means is that the process of the composition of this volume mirrors the very process of Creative Writing itself in a university context: ideas are submitted, subjected to full scrutiny

and comment, refined, re-thought and reiterated. Moreover, that mirroring between this book and the writing process is continued by the fact that the individual voices of the contributors are clearly heard: the chapters complement one another but remain distinct, and they encompass the full range of Creative Writing, with examples drawn from poetry, drama, fiction and non-fiction.

Although this is a book both by academics and for academics, the fact that its authors come from two different continents, and make reference to Creative Writing in universities across the globe, means that they do not take national contexts for granted: differences between academic practices in different countries are fully and carefully explained.

After an introduction from the editors, Jen Webb and Paul Hetherington reflect on the ways in which poetry might furnish fresh models of what constitutes new knowledge, and what kind of knowledge that might be. Jordan Williams considers the arguments and debates within the academy about doctoral programmes in Creative Writing, whilst Jeri Kroll focuses on the ways in which the whole context of training for research, especially the use of best practice, can underpin the supervision of research candidates in creative arts disciplines. Paul Munden describes and critiques the perspective on the discipline in UK universities, whilst Andrew Melrose takes a broader and more personal look at the pedagogical and critical underpinning of creative and critical research and reflects upon their relationship with interdependence and the collaborative process. Sue Joseph makes comparison between an “enactive methodology” within practice-led research leading to higher degrees in creative fields and the more established scientific method of reproducing “results”. Nigel McLoughlin suggests the model of Text World Analysis as a possible way in which writers can test out how texts are likely to construct meanings and affect among their readers, and, in the last chapter, Julian Meyrick, working from his experience of the collective processes in the theatre, proposes a new category of engagement, the fugue category, and considers the policy implications of such an approach.

Finally, on a personal note, I find the book especially heartening because, in 1998, I wrote a chapter in a book

edited by one of the contributors to this volume and, when I included it in a list of my publications for a research assessment exercise, it was flatly refused by my then university (without having been read) as being “not properly academic”. Now, eighteen years later, I have the evidence that writing like that chapter should be taken seriously.

*Geoff Ridden*

**Jen Webb, *Researching Creative Writing*. Frontinus Ltd., 2015. ISBN: 978-1907076374. £75 hardback or electronic download (£20 for NAWE members via the NAWE bookstore).**

The sixth in the pioneering Creative Writing Studies series from Frontinus, examining creative writing, *Researching Creative Writing* is from Jen Webb, Distinguished Professor in Creative Practice at the University of Canberra.

First Webb carefully sets out her stall, comprehensively examining the field in Chapter 1, which asks the question, “What is research?” She distinguishes between the general research that any writer undertakes in their practice (e.g. looking up a piece of information) and the specific, scrupulous and self-reflexive research a writer-researcher would undertake. Webb’s term, “writer-researcher”, is especially useful for providing a conceptual framework for this hybrid approach.

The book is sensibly structured in three parts: 1. “Designing the Research”; 2. “Doing Research”; and 3. “From materials to the Published Research”. Each of these is carefully examined, and supported with well-chosen examples and quotations from both creative and critical sources.

Webb sophisticatedly argues for creative writing’s place within the academic research community, situating it in parallel (rather than in opposition) to conventional quantitative research. The argument goes beyond the false binary of intuitive creative approaches and methodical critical ones. It shows how to be both: “Research in or through creative practice can provide a way to bridge these two worlds: to result in an output that undeniably adds knowledge, while also producing a satisfying work of literature.” (20)

In a comparative study with scientific research methodology it offers criteria for equivalent qualitative research in creative writing: a) credibility; b) transferability; c) dependability; d) confirmability. The book’s rhetoric is crystallized by such useful benchmarks.

Webb’s book is a perfect example of her advocated approach: a meta-commentary with chapters on subjects such as “epistemological preliminaries”. It also usefully examines ethical, axiological, questions, and along with ontological matters, suggests a holy trinity of issues (“what matters to them ... what they know and how they can know ... the nature of their, their characters’ and the fictional universe’s being...”), which “no creative writer who is working thoughtfully and imaginatively can fail to consider” (54-55).

Any reviewer would be hard-pressed to find flaws or omissions in this impressive, scholarly work. Webb is at pains to point out that it is a jumping off point rather than a definitive account of an expanding, self-interrogating field – something to which all writer-researchers are engaged in to a lesser or greater extent. The extensive references provide enough lines of enquiry to occupy many years of study. For those who do not have world enough, and time, there is also a very handy glossary of key terms.

Overall, *Researching Creative Writing* is lucidly-written, logically-structured, and convincingly argued. It offers a concise overview of the field and creative-critical discourse. It is a lighthouse in the pea soup surrounding practice-based research, and as such is useful and welcome. Above all, Webb wishes to “help writer-researchers both build networks with other writer-researchers and craft their own ‘toolkit’ that will help them produce better creative work, and innovative, engaging contributions to the worlds of literature and of knowledge” (20). That is an admirable sentiment. Perhaps when the paperback version becomes available that will be more likely to happen.

*Researching Creative Writing* is an essential addition to any writer-researcher’s (or respective institution’s) library. A few English Departments and AHRC funding decision-makers could definitely do with reading it. Anyone in doubt about the academic validity of practice-based research in creative writing (or, by

extrapolation, any artistic discipline) should – indeed must – read this.

*Kevan Manwaring*

**Jan Sellers & Bernard Moss (eds) *Learning with the Labyrinth, Creating Reflective Space in Higher Education*. Palgrave Teaching & Learning. ISBN 978-1-137-39383-8**

*listen, says the labyrinth,  
there's no here nor there  
just the path  
one way, an oak tree  
the other, a eucalyptus*

Although this is part of the Palgrave teaching and learning series, a book that takes the labyrinth as its subject was never going to fit into a pre-determined academic agenda. This is suggested by the extract above from Victoria Field's poem, "Choice", one of a series of "Poems from the Labyrinth" that separates each section. The book is an exploration of the theory and practice of labyrinths, looking particularly at how they are being used in universities and higher education spaces throughout Britain.

I must admit a bias here as I have taught for several years on the campus of the University of Kent, which, thanks to the efforts of co-editor Jan Sellers, has its own Canterbury Labyrinth. Having watched students use it and indeed walking it many times myself, I have both seen and experienced the benefits first hand. What did surprise me, however, is that there are currently 129 labyrinths on college and university campuses, according to the World-Wide Labyrinth Locator (out of a total of more than 4700 labyrinths in at least 75 countries.)

This book brings together the views of some of the academics, support staff, students and artists from across the world who have used one of those labyrinths, looking at different ways to create reflective spaces within higher education. One of the few common factors between the contributors is their current positivity towards using a labyrinth in this field and how this often contrasts with an initial ambivalence. "Facilitating the labyrinth in a commercially driven

environment in which clients paid substantial sums of money for sessions, and expected tangible outcomes, carried significant reputational risks for me and the university" writes Alex Irving of Liverpool John Moores University, about her work with the business development team at the University's Innovation Laboratory.

Sonia Overall, at Canterbury Christ Church University, writes a diary account of using the labyrinth with creative writing students:

*1.30: The Labyrinth. (Light) rain. I offer encouragement: this is a place for emptying the head, focusing ideas. It's not a race, I say. Think Sebald, I tell them. Think Borges. The students jump, hop, skip and slide to the centre. Some mime a minotaur. They clutch damp notebooks. One of them actually writes something down.*

Both editors have a distinguished academic history, with a strong emphasis on good teaching practice. Dr Jan Sellers is a National Teaching Fellow (NTF) and was the University of Kent's first Creative Learning Fellow. Bernard Moss is Emeritus Professor of Social Work Education and Spirituality at Staffordshire University, and a Principal Fellow and National Teaching Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. They are also trained labyrinth facilitators, and the strength of this book is in the number of practical case studies of how labyrinths have actually been used in very different settings.

Reflect: Receive: Return – the three Rs I learn is how a labyrinth is most usefully tackled. It's a structure that we see used in this book by Michelle Bigard of Central Michigan University with first-generation and low-income students as part of a Hero's Journey Labyrinth Workshop. Di Williams reports on how the labyrinth has been introduced to the University of Edinburgh by Chaplaincy Support Services, while Dr Jill Raggett and Steve Terry of Writtle College write about how labyrinths used by an artist-in-residence, Jim Buchanan, allowed students to work with the concept of space, collaboration, reflection and aesthetic enjoyment. The labyrinths discussed in this book vary from elaborate turf structures to simple finger models; they are traced onto canvas, or made from temporary materials such as sand, candles and even chicken feed. Some are even drawn by hand from patterns given in the book. Examples are given of how they have been used by

dancers, design students, midwives, health professionals, creative writers, business executives, artists, counsellors, and lawyers.

“There is no wrong way to walk the labyrinth,” write the editors, which of course can prove difficult for the ticks and crosses most academic evaluations require. Although the research element is tackled by Dr John W Rhodes, he admits that “the ‘gold standard’ of the double blind research design likely will not be met in labyrinth research.” Interestingly, Rhodes concludes by saying that while the actual uses of the labyrinth (as exemplified in the book) must inform future research, in future the roles could be reversed, with research informing the practices of using the labyrinth as a tool for engaging with teaching, learning and researching in higher educational establishments.

It’s a statement which sums up the pioneering, if sometimes frustrating, feel to this book. Like the labyrinth itself it offers reflections rather than direct answers, but again and again, contributors stress that the labyrinth needs to be walked in order to fully understand its effects. To this end, this book is a practical and inspiring guidebook for anyone interested in using this concept for contemplative and creative ways of enhancing learning. And I defy anyone reading it not to try at least the pencil labyrinth drawings for themselves.

*Sarah Salway*



**Poetry for Children: Primary Showcase**

In 2012, Poetry By Heart was launched as an England-wide school poetry recitation competition for 14-18 year old pupils. When Primary school teachers asked us if we could develop some poetry recitation resources for them to use in class, we were delighted to help. The resulting collection of 60 poems is designed to help Primary school pupils and teachers find poems they love, and enjoy them together through reading aloud and learning by heart. We hope to add more poems and more recordings in audio and video form.

The showcase offers children a diverse and enticing mixture of poems, classic and contemporary, surprising and familiar, that are all perfect for reading aloud. There are classic poets together with some of the best contemporary poets who write for children today. The collection includes a wide variety of times, styles and voices from the UK and beyond. Some will suit individual recitation, others are good for paired readings and shared readings, choral readings and dramatic

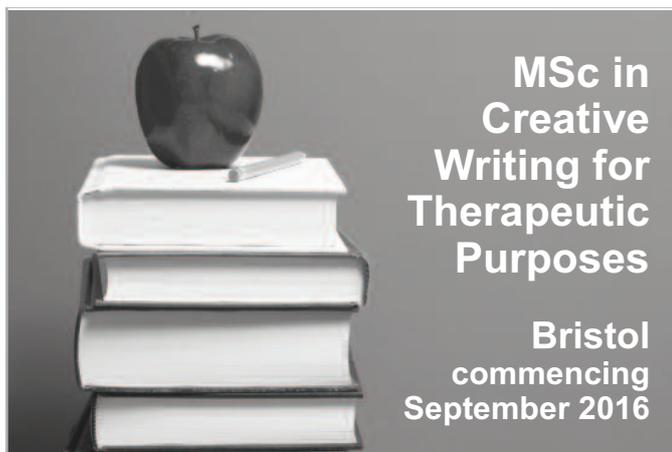
performances. The activities that accompany the poems encourage enjoyment, exploration, experiment and understanding. We hope you will find new treasures and old pleasures, and enjoy sharing these poems with the children you teach.

This guide has been designed to be read on-screen with links to the poems and additional online resources embedded in the text. We intend to add new poems to the site and to update the guide when we do. If you have subscribed to our mailing list, we will automatically send you updates. If you haven't and would like to receive these, or you would like to add other colleagues to our list, please register here:

<http://www.poetrybyheart.org.uk/contact-registration-form/>

We welcome your feedback via [info@poetrybyheart.org.uk](mailto:info@poetrybyheart.org.uk)

*Julie Blake, Co-founder and director, Poetry By Heart*



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Spring Issue: 1 February

Summer Issue: 1 May

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