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Editorial

Writing and Covid-19

Since the last issue of *TEXT* in October 2019, the world changed. During Covid-19 lockdowns, arts practitioners worldwide responded with web-based music sessions, comedy performances and art exhibitions. None of these outputs sound or look like products in conventional industry spaces. There has been a discovery of the home as stage and gallery, the desk as broadcast studio, and creative arts work as a commodity related to personal space. This links us to the idea of creative work at its origin: a home-grown and personal thing given legitimacy.

Most creative arts practitioners create in home environments, but the recording, performing, exhibiting and publishing occur outside the home. During the ‘outsiding’ process where the original locus of creation gets distanced, dissipated and othered, the work is changed into something less-recognisable to the practitioner in home studio or writing corner. A practitioner might say upon conventional publication or broadcast: ‘It’s not the work I thought I did’. But also, many of us think that work done in the home environment is enhanced and improved by industry processes.

The professional music production studio, the commercial theatre stage, the private or government gallery venue, and the publisher’s manipulated version of the text, take dominance in arts industries. But Covid-19 allows us to see what great stuff gets produced in ordinary offices, garages, bedrooms, lounge rooms, kitchens and on balconies. It is refreshing to see this return to the real environments of creativity, albeit in the most trying and restrictive of times.

This edition of *TEXT* includes a Special Issue – *The in/completeness of human experience* – edited by Julia Prendergast, Shane Strange and Jen Webb. Academic creative writers responded to a call to write about their experience of the Covid-19 situation. *TEXT*

restrictions were lifted: submissions were not refereed, minimal editing was done. Writers, as front-line responders, wrote ‘sudden’ pieces of up to 400 words and submitted within a 9-day contribution window. The editors received 200 works, of which 87 appear here in their original MS fonts.

And in further news, regarding the transfer to Scholastica, *TEXT* has been in significant contact with Scholastica regarding migration of the *TEXT* site to Scholastica hosting. While we have discovered significant cost issues, we pursue our resolution for change by publishing this issue entirely in pdf form. Pdf is the cheapest format to continue with, as opposed to html which *TEXT* has primarily published in during the last 23 years.

—*Nigel Krauth*

Vale Professor Brian Dibble

We at *TEXT* are saddened to acknowledge the passing of Professor Brian Dibble, author, academic and biographer of Elizabeth Jolley. Brian established one of Australia’s earliest creative writing programs in 1972 when he was appointed Foundation Head of English at Curtin University (at that time the West Australian Institute of Technology or WAIT). He was a founding member of the AAWP, serving on our National Executive for many years. He also served as a Director of the Australian Society of Authors. He was president of the Perth PEN Centre and the Fellowship of Australian Writers (WA) and a founding editor of *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies*. Brian began his writing career as a poet, and edited more than a dozen books, including two volumes of poetry by William Hart-Smith. In the later part of his career he was best known for his critical and biographical work on Elizabeth Jolley.

Brian was a contributor to the inaugural edition of *TEXT* in April 1997 with his article [‘Caring For and Feeding a Creative Writing Department’](#). In that article, he admitted that he founded WAIT’s creative writing course partly out of ignorance, partly out of arrogance, and partly due to accident. ‘I had taught Creative Writing and Literature in Illinois and in Wisconsin for eight years,’ he explained, and also worked as an editor of the *Beloit Poetry Journal*, which lost its funding not long after he joined it due to the publication of a blasphemous poem that saw its conservative Christian funding body withdraw support. Finding himself with a new appointment in far-flung Perth in the early 1970s, Brian undertook to turn the then service-oriented English department into a thriving ‘non-traditional’ department that by 1974 offered ‘undergraduate degrees and graduate and postgraduate diplomas in seven areas: Australian Studies, Creative Writing, Film and Television, Journalism, Literature, and Theatre Arts. Each of these (save our work in Literature),’ he wrote, ‘was something like an Australian first.’ Importantly, Dibble saw creative writing as ‘a praxis which ... should be conducted in the context of the assumptions, theory and principles of some discipline’. He required creative writing students in his fledgling courses to take units in literary criticism; a move he saw as provocative at that time.

Brian published again in *TEXT* in 2000. His [‘Writing Theory and/or Literary Theory’](#) (co-authored with Julienne van Loon) was a keynote address at the 1999 annual AAWP Conference, hosted by Edith Cowan University. Brian’s key argument in this article was that the ‘theory/practice schism is a relatively new development’ and that during the twentieth century ‘the subject of literature has been institutionalised as the domain of the theorists and critics, and the position of the thereby-marginalised writer has been redefined as more of a production-line worker than an independent producer’. Creative writers, he argued, will always be in need of theory (of course the opposite is also true). The epigraph for this article, chosen by Brian, was from Alexander Pope’s *Essays on Criticism*:

*True ease in writing comes with art, not chance;
As those move easiest who have learned to dance.*

In 2002, *TEXT* published a third article by Brian, [‘An idiot of the Present or a Genius of the Future: Some Problems, Some Promise’](#) in which he outlined challenges he’d come across in the creative writing classroom over three decades of teaching. Many of Western Australia’s leading writers and poets were students in Brian’s classroom, including Simone Lazaroo, Tim Winton, and Deborah Robertson. Brian’s fourth and final scholarly contribution to *TEXT* in 2004 was again co-authored with Julienne van Loon. [‘The Higher-Degree Journey as a Three-legged Race’](#) focussed on best-practice approaches to creative writing PhD supervision. Brian was an early advocate of the Creative Writing PhD in Australia and his doctoral graduates include Brett D’Arcy, Maureen Gibbons, and Terri-ann White.

Brian met the novelist Elizabeth Jolley at the launch of her first book in 1978. He invited her to work as a creative writing tutor at WAIT and they became long-term colleagues and friends. Brian and his partner and colleague, Dr Barbara Milech, later compiled the Elizabeth Jolley Bibliography, which became the Elizabeth Jolley Special Collection held by John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. Brian completed his biography of Jolley, *Doing Life*, in 2008. ‘In telling her life story, I was a detective, historian and novelist,’ he told the media on being shortlisted for the Prime Minister’s Literary Awards Non-Fiction Prize. *Doing Life* was also shortlisted for the National Biography Award and won the West Australian History category of the Western Australian Premier’s Book Awards. The critic at *The Australian* called it ‘an excellent and illuminating book’.

Many AAWP members remember Brian as a regular attendee at our annual conferences. He was a source of encouragement to many. He was known to quote Greek classicists one minute and Aussie bush humour the next: he was never short of a witticism. The creative writing discipline in Australian universities is the stronger for his early stewardship and his sustained commitment to (and long-term advocacy for) the field.

Brian passed away on 18 February 2020 after a prolonged illness.

—*Julienne van Loon*

In this edition

In the April 2020 edition of *TEXT*, Bonny Cassidy (RMIT University) enquires into creative writing's readiness as an academic discipline to acknowledge sovereign knowledges, and, in particular, how working within sovereign relationships might differ or distinguish itself from cultural awareness or from 'Indigenising' curriculum. Paul Magee (University of Canberra) argues that creative intellectual work without exegetical documentation is not only possible in humanities scholarship, it is a feature of some of the most valorised work in the field. 'Could we [in creative writing] not take our bearings from there?' he asks. Relatedly, Andrew Cowan (University of East Anglia) engages with debate about the knowledge status of art through a consideration of its contradictions, and suggests that a pragmatic solution is to be found in the operations of the UK's Research Excellence Framework (REF), which now accepts the research credentials of creative writing as being self-evident. In addition, Patrick West (Deakin University) argues for the ongoing value of doctoral degrees by prior publication in pollinating 'PhD of the Future' debates and in advancing industry engagement and social justice outcomes in the doctoral degree (research); and Delia Falconer (University of Technology Sydney) explores the uses and enchantments of the writer's notebook, arguing that the notebook's longevity and energy derive from the constant juxtaposition of often contradictory elements creating the ongoing quality of 'something else' that writers so often remark upon.

We're also excited to introduce *TEXT* readers to new scholarly work by some of our discipline's leading early career researchers, including: Maria Papas (University of Western Australia) whose contribution draws on philosophical, psychological and narratological underpinnings to investigate the gap that exists between conventional narrative structures and the narratives employed by those with lived experience of trauma or critical illness; Rees Quilford (RMIT University) whose work engages with the everyday historical forces and currents that shape localities, and examines the intimate associations and connections that exist between people and the places they inhabit; and Rhett Davis (Deakin University) who presents an exegetical reflection on his PhD novel, *Hovering*, and explores his journey in writing about his home town of Geelong by avoiding it. Avoiding it? Yes.

We hope you'll agree it's a wonderful edition of *TEXT*.

—*Julienne van Loon and Ross Watkins*