Responding to Creative Writing

EDITED BY GRAEME HARPER

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This book first published 2020

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-5759-6
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-5759-8

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INTRODUCTION

RESPONDING TO CREATIVE WRITING

GRAEME HARPER

Responding, Responsive, Response

Creative writing is a responsive human activity. We use it to respond to the world, to our feelings, to ideas we have, to our observations, to other people, to historical or cultural events, to the speculations produced by our imaginations. In itself, being responsive does not make creative writing distinctive. After all, every human activity is surely some kind of response to us being in the world. How could it be otherwise, given none of us come from another world, and existence in this world cannot but influence each of us in some way? That said, the thought worth pursuing here concerns how creative writing might be a distinctive response. And, if it is so, in what ways that might be the case. Assuming we acknowledge that is the case, how might our response to creative writing also have distinctive characteristics? In effect, here is a two-way exchange: our *responding by* doing creative writing and, then, our *responding to* how we are doing creative writing and what we are producing by doing it.

At its most basic, to respond is to reply or to answer. We use the concept of responding often as a judgement about the quality of an interpersonal communication. Common expressions such as "____ didn't respond" or "I was waiting for a response" or "____ responded eventually" suggest we judge a failure to respond as the breaking of a contract between a person or persons and another person or persons. The idea here is that if any interpersonal communication is initiated then the conclusion must be a response. No response, even if the person to whom the communication is directed did not request or even desire the communication, is seen as negative and often worthy of comment. "I was looking for a speaker for the conference. I emailed Professor Smith, but she did not respond." Worse still

if we know the person well, and get no response: "I left a message for my friend Liam but he hasn't called back. I hope he's okay."

Of course, responding does not necessarily involve a verbal or written exchange. It could involve an expectation of a physical encounter of some kind. A tennis player might be said to have "not responded" to the pressure applied by their opponent rushing the net, or a street fight did not happen because when pushed by an assailant the person attacked "did not respond". Turning the latter into the beginnings of a story, police would be said to be "responding to a call" if they were contacted about the assault. The notion of a response then would entail a reply to that initial communication, and it would apply also to whether they did or did not take any action. Some law enforcement agencies around the world have special units called "tactical response teams" – thus suggesting a response (in this specific instance and, we can see, generally too) has a character, a focus, often a duration, and frequently a result. In all instances, a response might be thought of as appropriate or inappropriate, weak or strong, targeted or untargeted, well-informed or ill-informed. A response might be arbitrary or ad hoc or it could be strategic, tactical, planned perhaps and then implemented. Not all references to a response refer to an action. Inactivity can also be the focus. In a medical situation, a patient who is said to be not responding is often considered to be in danger, their lack of response representing a failure or inability to confirm they are all right or to improve their condition.

Even in such a brief exploration our understanding of the notion of "responding" includes a range of potential elements:

Initiation and reaction. What inaugurates the interaction? Here we can consider the action, observation or thought that brings about a response, or a lack of response. This can be considered as the stimulus. If a response is a reply or an answer but also a reaction then it is not merely a generic rejoinder or random reciprocation it is also a type of behavior. It is the attitude taken. Stimulus and response thus equals initiation and reaction.

Type and style of responding can be examined. Types and styles of response will have both internal influences (individual psychology) and external influences (societal, cultural, economic, political). A simple, non-creative writing, example might be: it is a hot day and you, having a fine home with air-conditioning, inadvertently adjust the temperature upward rather than downward. The initiation or stimulus is the rising heat. Your type of response is based on your sense of available options (and your belief or realization concerning your ability to make such a mistake). Your style of response, also influenced by available options, relates additionally to how much the heat bothers you. Perhaps to whether you are sharing the space with others. Also maybe to learnt behavior (maybe you grew up somewhere

where the response to a hot summer day is to fan yourself or, alternatively, where the population stops working when it gets too hot). Types and styles of responding reveal personal and societal influences, and these are available for our analysis.

Focus and duration of a response relates to such things as perceived significance of the stimulus and the intended audience of the response, the intellectual and/or emotional intensity of the interaction, the sense of value, expectations about the responsive interaction with one or many people (or with the self, perhaps), strength of your belief in your contribution to the action-reaction, attractants in the initiation (such things as sights, sounds, smell – that is, sensory stimuli – and contextual reference points such as cultural heritage, social or group dynamics or inclusion or exclusion). Duration of a response might depend on levels of energy or on environmental factors such as the weather or the cycle of night and day or on the availability of materials. So, if we see the writing of a novel as a response to multiple stimuli, personal and public, we could say that the belief that a novel takes some time to write means that as a response it has considerable duration.

Pace, Rhythm and Cadence of response, noting that any kind of responding has a pattern of delivery, of sound (literally and/or figuratively), and in the relationship of one part of a response to another part. A response can be as defined by its delivery as it is in its content. So, for example, a response to a moment of historical significance, an event in natural, economic, political or cultural history, could be a short shout or a prolonged address. It could have the cadence of a sermon or the pace of a lecture. It could appear as casual conversation or as carefully structured oration. If responding is related to a stimulus and its initiation (as seems logical to suggest, being as it is a reaction not an action without origin) then a response can follow the lead of the stimulus or be a counterpoint in its cadence, its movement.

Intention and Meaning certainly also relate to responding, even if it is also accurate to see these as principles and messages that can't simply be contained within the concept of response. For example, we could spend some time speaking about the idea (and relevance) of writerly intention and only in part relate this to a discussion of how writers respond to the world or to a speculation of their imaginations or to a feeling. In that case, we might talk about intention as a goal-driven activity, wedded to expectation, though with a partial connection to the act of responding to stimuli. Nevertheless, intention can be said to be a key driver of response because it is a guide for us to whether our response is appropriate. A day-to-day example of this would be when driving on a slippery road and feeling your

car sliding you might back off acceleration with the intention of gaining grip. The response is an action, the intention is to ensure your safety.

Meaning is concerned with information and concepts. We could say, without meaning what is there? What, that is, would we know about the world? What would we know about ourselves? But meaning is also contained within response in that a response can be orchestrated to suggest meaning, or indeed an impromptu or improvised response could reveal what we believe something means, even if we have not fully considered our beliefs and the information and concepts connected with those beliefs.

Finally, responding involves **skills, techniques and aptitude.** These have their genesis in human nature. In other words, we tend to develop skills that build on our natural predilections and interests. One example is our varied prowess at the "fight or flight" response. This is a natural physiological reaction (that is, a response) to a threat to our survival. Our nervous system sends out impulses and our endocrine system releases hormones. We experience an increase in heart rate, our breathing speeds up, our pupils dilate, we sweat more and become more alert to the sights and sounds around us. All this is a natural response. However, our abilities to successfully fight or fly depend on the development of skills and techniques and aptitude. So it is with all responding. While we might draw on nature we benefit from nurture. Of course, in creative writing much of what we can do comes from the realm of nurture. We draw on our predilection to communicate with other human beings. But writing is a learnt skill, and writing creatively is a specific skill. To do this well we have to develop techniques and aptitude.

Responding through and to creative writing involves all of those elements.

This book is largely about *responding to* creative writing; however, a number of the contributors are drawing on their own creative writing (that is, their *responding through*) to consider their critical approaches to the making of a creative work and to the finished work. In essence, combining approaches.

The title *Responding to Creative Writing* also uses the shorthand "responding" to refer to three conjoined but particular conditions:

Responding – the actions entailed, the behaviors, the answering, the replying to stimuli, stimuli that can include thoughts and feeling and inventions of our imaginations as well as observed events. I can respond *through* creative writing and/or *to* creative writing.

Responsive - the sensitivity to stimuli that more or less initiates our action. We talk of someone being responsive when they react in a way that is apt and often productive. A responsive approach is seen as empathetic,

engaged, aware. Your responsiveness can relate to how you use creative writing to respond, or how you respond to your creative writing or the creative writing of others.

Response – general definitions suggest this can certainly be an activity. However, here responding is taken to be that activity and a response is taken to be the material result. So, you are responding to an historical event by writing a poem; your response is the drafts of that poem and its completed form. Alternatively, you are responding to your feelings about a particular place on the coast by writing a short story. Your response is the material evidence of that short story you have so far produced, but not yet completed. A response can be in the form of creative writing or a response can be in the form of critical writing about creative writing.

To reply or answer an observation, a thought, an imaginative leap, a feeling through creative writing is such a decidedly human activity. We construct written languages, and then use those languages creatively so that we can establish and maintain bridges between our intellects and our imaginations. In doing so our responses create not only a form of communication but wonderful works of art. We gain pleasure from doing this and perhaps even occasionally, all being well with how we create and what we create, provide pleasure for others that encounter the works we produce. When we respond to the making of those works, or to the outcomes of the actions of other creative writers we seek to reply to those writers, in some way, and to the works that they present, to answer questions about why those works were produced, and how, and for whom, and to whose satisfaction. When we are engaged in any way with creative writing, such is the dual nature of what we can call our responding.

Responding *Through* Creative Writing

A creative writer, seeking to respond to the world, an idea, an imaginative leap, a thought, might choose creative writing to do so. Might, because even though we are creative writers we have other choices at hand. General choices, such as simply commenting on something to a friend or sending a text or email to a colleague. Empathetic spontaneous choices such as shouting out loud or crying with joy or despair. Specific prepared choices, such as (assuming we have the skills and the interest) speaking to a public audience, or writing an article for a magazine, or even creating an online photo montage. In other words, responding is often a choice, even sometimes when it seems spontaneous. There are many, alternative choices readily available to us. We creative writers make one of those often well-

prepared choices – perhaps relatively frequently and often with considerable enthusiasm – our creative writing.

Responding through creative writing uses the intellect and imagination interacting and intersecting – such is the nature of creative writing. And in such writing we explore, construct and present responses that are distinctive but also have some clear associations with other human responses.

Responding through creative writing produces such familiar activities and things seen in innumerable other human undertakings, not only in our writing practices:

Exploratory materials that inspire, inform and contribute to your project, whatever you are doing and for whatever. The status of these materials (for example, what and who they represent and how, their ontological condition [how they relate to a worldview and support that worldview], their veracity, their combined effect.

Experiences of creating, the initiating, revisiting, refining that is taking (or did take) place. The environment where the project or projects are being undertaken. Associations with other people that influence our working or the works we produce – including professional associations related to the tasks themselves itself (for example, collaborations, editorial input, critical opinions). These experiences will likely vary over time and place and represent conditions well beyond these dimensions too.

Investigating subjects and themes in that much we do in our lives relates to our responding to what we see, hear or feel and that these often are undertaken (and considered) in terms of subjects and themes. For example, we paint a room in our house it might indeed be decorated according to a theme. We start a discussion in a corporate meeting and it often will indeed have a specific subject. Subjects and themes inform our response to the world, to each other and to our thoughts and imaginative speculations.

Working within/ working outside of conventions, so that the response can represent an application of or challenge to what we already do. A convention or paradigm is a model, and we follow these in many avenues of our lives. Any response we make to an event, a thought, an observation works in some way within or outside of such conventions.

Final material results, the end result of our responding. Of course, not everything we produce in the world can be predicted. But much that we do when we respond through our actions (or sometimes inaction) can be projected to its final material results. What will be produced if we react in a certain way? What things will result, what further actions will likely be inaugurated, by our response or responses?

An encouragement of critical opinion of others – because we judge the responses of others using the gauge of our own interpretations and beliefs. Encouraged to make such judgements, not least through our survival instincts, informed by cultural and societal expectations and our individual psychologies, any response by anybody to anything is potentially subject to critical judgement from others.

Those are all common manifestations of our responding through any kind of human activity. But responding through creative writing, specifically, also produces some activities and things that are largely particular to creative writing:

Style and types of action are produced that are only produced in their shape and form in creative writing. So, methods of composing enhanced by the heightened influence of the imagination. Finding actions largely focused on the written word, and arrangement of the written word. Types of literacy that are specific to both written communication and the use of elements within it such as description and image.

Some genre are specific to creative writing. So we use categories such as "romance" and "crime" to refer to forms that exist in many artistic compositions - film, TV and literature for example – but the novel and the poem, the screenplay and the short story are creative writing genre. Our responding through the composition of these therefore sees us using them as particular tools or conduits or methods of response. Because these genre are located in creative writing, they declare creative writing's uniqueness, which is not to dismiss genre that are seen elsewhere but it is to say creative writers and creative writing is always an explicit and nuanced choice.

Imaginatively heightened writing (that is, creative writing) recognizes and promotes human feeling, creativity, psychologies, spirituality, ingenuity, inspiration, resourcefulness, vision, originality and artfulness. Responding to the world, an idea, an emotion or an observation using this kind of writing is therefore a declaration and promotion of these qualities. What happens to do this, and what results from doing this (in writing) can be investigated to provide us with more knowledge about what this form of response offers such as individuals, and even as a species.

Valued cultural artefacts result from our responding through creative writing. Of course, such a declaration comes with a number of provisos! What is valued and what is not valued varies over time and over place. Value might attach itself to what is "recognizable" (thus a well-known poet might be considered to have produced a more valuable cultural artefact, even if the technical or aesthetic qualities of it are exceeded by a work by a less well-known poet). Value is impacted upon by economics, politics, moments in

history and changes in taste and, sometimes, in acceptability of theme or topic. Nevertheless, these things aside (but not ignored), all cultures that produce creative writing also value it in some way. Responding through creative writing therefore often carries a certain degree of cultural kudos, and the artefacts produced by creative writers are regularly celebrated, revered and archived into cultural history.

Styles of critical response are explicitly suggested by creative writing – because it is a form of writing, because it declares itself creative (that is, inventive, novel, ingenious) and because such styles of critical response have built up over many years now in popular and academic venues so that expectations of how to respond, as well as often what to respond to, are embedded in education, in cultural discourse and in the popular mind. Literary criticism, which is by far the biggest systemic class here, is familiar to many of those of us who have responded to the world through creative writing. Whether we agree with the approaches taken by literary critics, the assumptions made, the methods employed, or the conclusions offered, it is to literary criticism many have turned over the past century and a half to assist them in understanding how those who respond through creative writing go about doing so, and what the results are of them doing so – the works they produce, the subjects and topics they have explore, the historical and cultural contexts of these, the meaning in the works, or the reasons why one work is more valuable than another.

More recently, building on a long history of creative writing in higher education the field of Creative Writing Studies has grown and diversified and is gaining even more momentum. It gains momentum from a dissatisfaction with how creative writing and creative writers are perceived to have been allocated some portion of literary studies. Or how creative writing and creative writers have been seen as an adjunct to engagement with literature. Or how creative writing has been viewed as a tool to improve literacy but not as epistemological realm grouping in its own right. Or how it has been presented as a creative activity on campus but not as an investigative one. Critical responses to our responding *through* creative writing are largely responding *to* creative writing, and the reader might notice that particular topic has a modicum of substance here in this book! However, not all responding to creative writing is Creative Writing Studies. Critical responses to creative writing might simply be personal, emotive, inquisitive, casually off-hand, part of some other field or discourse where knowledge of creative writing is not known, required or generally pursued, or brought about by someone else's interest and your participation in some social engagement. Exploring something through creative writing might well produce a response from yourself or others, but the depth and breadth

and understanding in such a response might not be the focus or the intention of the response. Creative writing is a popular and common human activity so it is part of our wider engagement with the world around us.

A unique combination of communication and art in words makes creative writing what it is. That uniqueness informs how we respond through doing it, why we respond through doing it, and who cares that we respond through doing it. That being the case, the nature, form, and shape of this combination is distinctive to the practice, and comparative consideration of how that is approached by different writers and to what ends can be revealing.

When we respond through creative writing we are answering or replying to something using creative writing as our voice, our tool, our discourse – responding, perhaps, to an observation, an idea, an imaginative leap, an historical event, a person, to people, to a cultural phenomenon. In doing so we will display varying degrees of engagement and understanding – that might indeed be called awareness and empathy – combined with varying degrees of technical skill. Writing, after all, is a learnt skill and we must nurture it in order to become good at it. But creative writing also involves the transcendental and the non-concrete, the metaphysical. To be responsive *through* creative writing therefore means not only developing technical skills but also having incorporeal abilities and insights that are sometimes difficult to quantify. In essence, while we can indeed point to the use of some or all of the many components of written language, celebrate accuracy and appropriateness, correctness and clarity, word choice, grammar and punctuation, and more, responsiveness through creative writing is also about why we are doing it. It is about for whom we are doing it. And about what ways our creative writing brings satisfaction to ourselves and/or to others. Some of this might be manifest in the final outcomes of our writing. However, for the creative writer, some of our satisfaction, perhaps even the majority of our satisfaction, can be located in our strikingly multifold actions of writing creatively.

Responding *to* Creative Writing

At the most basic level, we undertake creative writing, and because that undertaking leaves behind evidence of it happening we have manifestations of the actions and results of creative writing existing in the world - to which we can therefore respond. This is important to note because, of course, it is not a requirement of our responding to anything that it must exist in material terms. We can respond to an idea, or an emotion or an imaginative conjecture.

However, in the case of creative writing when we are responding *to* it we are responding to one or both of the following:

Actions and experiences of doing creative writing. These can be our own actions, the actions of other writers, or a combination of these things. We can respond to these "in motion", as they are happening, or after they have happened. We need to develop methods of considering these, of course; and it can be that observation is not always practical or likely to produce accurate information because in the observing we might alter the actions themselves. With this in mind, responding to the actions of creative writing can involve inductive and deductive reasoning, developing and testing hypotheses (for example, a poet might propose their compositional technique is largely driven by connective speculations, seeing the figurative links between things), but find in considering this proposition that in fact they are more inclined to create story, narrative pace and focus being more significant to them than metaphor). Comparative study of writerly actions might draw on interviews or diary entries or consider drafts, basing this on genre or location or associations between writers, or on the influence of education, or on other cultural, social, economic or personal circumstances.

Material evidence here might indeed include those drafts, that correspondence, as well as final works – but us responding to these in this case not in terms of the actions that produced them but in terms of what they appear to offer in their material form. That is, how the writing appears, what meanings are projected, what representations are present. While it is true literary scholars have undertaken this kind of work, here we are approaching this material from the viewpoint of it having not existed, of it being contingent on creative writerly practice. We acknowledge not only that creative writers exist but that they create through their (our) thoughts and actions and feelings material evidence of these things and that this material evidence represents such practice, that it is not separable from the writer, but rather can best be approached as evidence of their practice, knowledge and understanding.

The field of Creative Writing Studies largely focuses on a response to creative writing – but it does not preclude doing creative writing as part of that approach. In other words, while as a field it is grounded in a response to creative writing it is possible to use creative writing practice as one of the methodologies. The difference between simply responding through creative writing and responding to creative writing through also doing it is that the writer is consciously considering the critical engagement they have with their practice, its place in the world, and its outcomes.

Responding to creative writing, while it might for many people be casual and informal and informed largely by personal taste and opinion, when it is undertaken within Creative Writing Studies or, even when it is simply taking the lead from the field in being critically engaged with the practices and outcomes, such response has an epistemological depth (that is, it is aware of and exploring a type of knowledge) and it has a methodological structure and intention (that is, it is criticism informed by analytical techniques that are understood and often systematic. Responding to creative writing therefore incorporates investigation of:

How it is done – whether through doing it or by considering how it is done by others (individual, groups, comparatively, over cultures, time, in relation to other arts practices, and more).

Why it is done – by an individual writer (who might be ourselves) or a group of writers at a particular time or in a particular place.

What material evidence is produced – in the initiation of a project or projects, during it and as an end result. These materials, as considered in Creative Writing Studies, might be more varied, more orientated toward practices (such as in the case of drafting and writerly correspondence of all kinds) and more likely to be interpreted in relation to the "how" of the practice than traditionally is seen in the field of Literary Studies.

How does it compare – that is, both the practices and the outcomes. Comparisons between projects and outcomes, between writers, over time, over place, in terms of different genre, in relation to themes or subjects, in terms of specific techniques, particular representations (these as just a few examples).

Responsiveness here is not greatly different to that seen in responding *through* creative writing. Responding *to* involves degrees of engagement with writing actions and/or results. To be responsive in this instance means developing a depth of knowledge that relates to practices and results and to the understanding of these. That is a baseline. More precisely it can include knowledge of the interrelation of practices – so, say, how initiation of a project relates to progress of it, individual actions that contribute to the project, how intermediate outcomes and activities (for example, unfinished work, additional research, changes in your environment) impact. Knowledge here can be comparative, between projects, between writers, between places and times – but responsiveness means and requires awareness.

Why Respond?

In medical terms, unresponsiveness is considered potentially dangerous, a sign of a life-threatening condition. A failure to react to a communication is interpreted as unhelpful at least and unproductive, even rude, at worst. A lack of reaction perhaps indicates a lack of interest, a lack of concern, a rejection of something or someone, a missed connection (something not seen, heard, touched). To not respond suggests we might not be all right, we might not improve our condition – whatever doing such a thing would entail.

For a creative writer to respond to the world through creative writing is frequently core to our being. Choosing this form of communication and art, why would we not use it to respond to things that interest us, concern us or attract us? As a Creative Writing Studies scholar our focus of attention is clearly creative writing, and so responding to it is also core to our field and our interests. And there are other reasons too why we choose to respond through creative writing and to creative writing. That is, it is a well-known and widely exchanged activity, its results travel across cultures, across history and across geography. It thus is what we might call a lingua franca, even though paradoxically its presence in a primary first written language is often a significant element of its identity. Creative writing is also in many ways an accessible practice – at least for those in the world who are afforded the opportunity to become literate. Certainly, this is not an opportunity offered to everyone. When and where we can respond through creative writing, cultures value both the practice and its final outcomes – so responding through it and to it comes with some sense of generally recognized value. Finally, if we are teaching creative writing (and many reading here will be doing that) responding through and/or to creative writing increases our knowledge and understanding. So, simply, the obligation to be as knowledgeable as we can be for our students about the practice and its outcomes is met by a critically informed responding through or responding to.

This Book

The chapters here in *Responding to Creative Writing* demonstrate responding, response and responsiveness. The shorthand book title references all three of these aspects, and it will be clear many of the contributors draw on their own creative writing practice as the starting point for their explorations. The range of themes and subjects here is a consideration – from methodologies of practice-led research in the field, to creative writing teaching, from

language use to genre, from uses of history to how to go about responding to defined themes and subjects. As a book in the field of Creative Writing Studies this is a specimen text; and, of course, the focus here is responding/responsiveness/response. However, Creative Writing Studies is a field with many dimensions and approaches, methodologies and outcomes. Similarly, while this is a themed book, it also draws on the concerns of the contributors, their interpretations, their goals and, ultimately, their seeking of satisfaction through practicing and/or analyzing creative writing. If there is a bigger answer or reply to be read here, a more general response, it is that critically exploring creative writing, through whatever means, produces inventive, energetic results founded not simply in the production of texts but in the exchange of ideas and feelings, and in communicating and sharing these.

CHAPTER ONE

RESPONDING TO THE IDEASTHETIC EXPERIENCE: WRITING A COMPARATIVE EKPHRASIS

DAN O'CARROLL

Abstract

This chapter proposes and explores the concept of "the ideasthetic experience" as a way of conceptually approaching and understanding moments of insight mediated by art. Such experiences involve a felt sense of inherent artistic value which is mediated by a particular set of artistic and sensory inputs, such that their apprehension evokes a balance of intensities between embodied emotional response and intellectual resonance. Ideasthetic experience is framed in terms of ideasthesia balance theory as proposed by Nikolić.[1] The chapter then attempts to trace, in the light of this theory, the formation of one particular ideasthetic experience in the practitioner-researcher which took place within the context of a research visit to a heritage site. The experience was catalysed by a spontaneous comparison of two paintings, one present in front of the practitioner, and one evoked from memory. The subsequent creative piece that resulted from the experience is then framed as an attempt to evoke a corresponding ideasthetic experience in the reader through multiple applications of the rhetorical concept of ekphrasis, that is, rendering images with words.

Keywords: ideasthesia balance theory, creative writing, decoloniality, critical heritage discourse.

[1] Danko Nikolić, "Ideasthesia and Art," *Cognition* 98 (2016), 53-84.

Introduction

What is it that is happening when we have a moment of what might be called insight that is evoked through art—that moment where a series or constellation of impressions, whether mediated through the standard five senses or, by the inclusion of what Buddhism enumerates as the sixth sense, the mind, brings something home to us that was not obvious before, or perhaps was seen, or believed, or considered, but not quite *understood* in that visceral bodily sense? This, in a less formal register than I can posit in an academic abstract, is the question I would like to tackle in the chapter which follows.

The chapter is an exploratory, rather than an explanatory one, in which I make an attempt, through engaging the critical language of ekphrasis and ideasthesia, to render verbally an experience which at the time *felt* neither verbal, nor entirely aesthetic, but seemed to include and transcend both.

Context and catalyst

What I will call my "ideasthetic experience" was catalysed by a visit to a small cathedral in Bangor, Wales. It took place in the middle of an extremely busy research trip, during which I was critically interrogating discourses used in heritage guidebooks and interpretation at Penrhyn Castle, a site that belongs to the United Kingdom's largest heritage organisation, the National Trust. A key strand of my interdisciplinary PhD research is focused on interrogating official concepts of heritage through the lens of decoloniality, an approach which, in short, problematises "Eurocentric conceptualisations of modernity, globalisation, knowledge and 'being.'"[2] The castle was built mostly from profits from a Jamaican sugar plantation worked by enslaved Africans. After abolition, it was financed through the work of local men at a nearby quarry who worked under gruelling conditions and were very badly treated during the longest running industrial dispute in British history. As such, it was a perfect site for my purposes, ripe for critique.

The three days previous to the experience I will look at had been spent talking to ex-miners and visiting the quarry with an expert local guide, as well as visiting the castle itself with members of the local Jamaican community. The overall impression I got, from both formal interviews and informal chats, was that grievances were still present, however deeply

[2] Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti, "(Towards) Decoloniality and Diversality in Global Citizenship Education," *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 9, no. 3-4 (2011), 381-397.

buried, hidden from sight, or clothed in the garb of diplomacy. As an illustration, I will repeat an excerpt from the creative piece that arose from the visit:

> The Jamaican High Commissioner arrives with his party and members of the Jamaica Wales Alliance. I join the party as a tolerated hanger-on and fall into conversation with a woman called Susan, one of only five or six people of Jamaican heritage accompanying the tour[…].
>
> The High Commissioner is attentive and curious and accompanies the guide upstairs to the dining room. One of his party stays downstairs in her wheelchair because there are no lifts in the building. But nobody makes a fuss. Everything proceeds in that oddly nervous way attempts at relaxed goodwill often do. The Commissioner talks in detail with the visitor manager. They discuss the dining table and service, and the plush deep red velvet covers and carpets, and the portraits of the plantation-owners' patriarchs, including one of the second Lord Penrhyn: the self-styled 'improver' himself. I cross paths with Susan again. We discuss her research. We discuss mine. I gesture round the room.
>
> 'He liked his scarlet things,' I say. The carpet, the upholstery, the curtains, are all Caravaggio-cloak red. Rich and deep.
>
> Susan pauses for a moment. She turns to me. Looks me dead in the eye.
>
> 'Well, he wasn't afraid of blood, was he?'
>
> It is the single dark sentence I hear uttered by anyone during the whole visit.

Ideasthesia, ideasthesia in art and the ideasthetic experience

I first came across the idea of ideasthesia during a presentation by the author and scholar, Julia Prendergast, at the 2019 Great Writing conference in London, and found it a fascinating concept. The theory of ideasthesia has its origins in neuroscientific research into people who experience synaesthesia, a condition whereby one sense perception stimulates associative perceptual cognates in another, such that, for instance, a sound might be perceived as orange and crunchy, or a colour as bitter and loud. For people who exhibit synaesthesia, the research suggests that these unusual perceptual associations are mediated by concepts, rather than being the result of aberrant neuronal connections. Although there is strong evidence that synaesthetic experience "differs substantially from real events," there is equally strong evidence that it is "susceptible to lexical/semantic contexts," and it is on this basis that the theory of ideasthesia was

introduced.[3] In its initial formulation, Danko Nikolić suggested the term *ideasthesia* as a replacement for the term *synaesthesia*, then applied the term specifically to represent the idea that "concepts precede sensory-like experiences in synesthesia [sic]."[4]

More recently, Nikolić ventured a theory of art whereby art arises from a balance of the two components of ideasthetic experience, namely conceptual meaning and experiential sensation, such that "art happens when the intensities of the *meaning produced* by a certain creation and the intensities of the *experiences induced* by that creation are balanced out" (my emphasis).[5]

What I will call here the *ideasthetic experience* is that human experience, whether momentary or sustained, where, through balanced intensities of embodied emotional response and intellectual resonance (thoughts, memories and understandings, verbal or non-verbal), an object or event is apprehended as of artistic value. In memorable cases of ideasthetic experience (and I think the experience I will recall here qualifies), there is a climactic moment where a sudden opening of understanding takes place, a broadening of sympathies: there is a *felt sense* of unity and coherence that could be described as insight, which is neither intellectual nor purely emotional, but contains elements of, and transcends, both.

Priming the ideasthetic experience

When I set out to translate the ideasthetic experience into non-fiction prose, it was important for me to make sure that the emotional timbre of the pivotal scene to come was communicated directly, as well as the external context and the varied kinds of thoughts and feelings that were prevalent over the preceding days of the visit. The piece, which is provisionally titled "Caravaggio and the High Commissioner's reception" opens, as several sections in the book do, with an italicised maxim:

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[3] Rocco Chiou and Anina N. Rich, "The Role of Conceptual Knowledge in Understanding Synaesthesia: Evaluating Contemporary Findings from a "hub-and-Spokes" Perspective," *Frontiers in Psychology* 5 (2014). doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00105. https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00105/full.

[4] Danko Nikolić, "Is Synaesthesia Actually Ideasthesia? an Inquiry into the Nature of the Phenomenon ," in *Proceedings of the Third International Congress on Synaesthesia, Science & Art*, 2009), 26-29.; Nikolić, "Ideasthesia and Art," , 53-84

[5] Ibid.

> *It's hard to be careful of things we don't know we're losing. But be careful we must.*

Then the text proper begins with a declaration of preoccupations and themes and an admission of disquiet:

> I'd been thinking about guilt and shame and the difference between them, and about remembrance and reparations, when I popped into Bangor Cathedral the following afternoon, a Thursday. Something had unnerved me about the previous day, though I couldn't put my finger on what it was. I needed a day off after the intensity of the quarry museum, the castle and the Commissioner's visit, and making unscheduled visits to chapels was something I had done since I was a child.

Some degree of contextual and thematic priming is included here, including the full section (excerpted above) on the Commissioner's visit, with its issues of inaccessibility for the entourage member in her wheelchair, and the just-below-the-surface tension revealed through reference to the bloodshed involved in the Jamaican plantations.

I list in some detail the intensity of the impressions of the previous three days, during which there has been a lot of travelling, a lot of listening and talking, a great deal of taking in and processing. I try to convey the intensity of the previous night's civic reception for the High Commissioner as a way of sign-posting, building-up a sense of disjuncture and tension that needs to be released and/or resolved in the final section, as well as attempts by officialdom to broker "official" versions of heritage with diplomacy and events—events which actually become subverted by a true artist, a daring and challenging poet.

> …There is a performance by Rhys Trimble of a poem he wrote in Jamaica. He slips in and out of Welsh and English and he bawls it out from his feet while flailing a tortured wooden staff about his head. It is powerful and it is thrilling and I can barely understand a word he says but I know whatever he is saying, he absolutely fucking means it, and it fits. It fits the night. And he knows it. And everyone present knows it. And then moments later a male voice choir sings for twenty minutes and leaves me blown wide open and in tears.
>
> And yet.
>
> And yet I wonder what Susan is making of all this. And the woman who was left behind in the wheelchair.

Resonances come into play, memories are triggered of other events and themes that are autobiographically important to me as a practitioner and a

writer. Without the space in this chapter to reproduce long sections in their entirety, it will suffice to say that these resonances and memories grate up against theoretically-sensitised disjunctions and discomforts. The question of whether these theoretically-sensitised elements would have been noticed (or at least, noticed as strongly and with such clarity and force) without the theoretical reading that preceded the visit is one that ideasthesia balance theory addresses explicitly. According to ideasthesia balance theory, our experiences are mediated by concepts, and so, theoretically *priming* myself with questions of decoloniality and injustice, "official" discourse and marginalised experience, predisposes me to reference these types of resonances and associations in my experiential interpretive frameworks during my research trip.

Ekphrasis as catalyst for the ideasthetic experience

Ekphrasis has become a popular concept in critical circles in recent years, and attempts have been made to move its definition from a popular formulation given by Heffernan in the 1990s—"the verbal representation of visual representation" towards one posited by Renate Brosch which is perhaps more useful for contemporary creative practitioners working in a digital age: "ekphrasis is a literary response to a visual image or visual images."[6] This definition acknowledges ekphrasis as process and not a state or a simple one-to-one correspondence. It emphasises the performative over the mimetic, "gestures towards effects at the level of reception and audience", and as such, by examining the experiential quality of ekphrasis, takes into account both its "persuasive function," and "its capacity to appeal to an embodied and emotional response."[7] It is these capacities—to persuade, and not only to 'appeal to' but also *evoke* embodied and emotional response—that I see as resonant with the capacity of ekphrasis *as method* to evoke and bring about the ideasthetic experience. As Brosch puts it, ekphrasis can be a powerful aid and catalyst to insight and can "adapt, recalibrate, and recreate the reader's knowledge."[8]

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[6] James AW Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (University of Chicago Press, 2004).; Renate Brosch, "Ekphrasis in the Digital Age: Responses to Image," *Poetics Today* 39, no. 2 (2018), 225-243.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid., 232

Comparative ekphrasis as critique

Nikolić's ideasthesia balance theory goes some way to describing the *felt sense* of the place where aesthetic appreciation and intellectual understandings merge in moments of deep artistic appreciation. The experience I want to discuss, and that I tried to represent in the final section of my creative piece, emerged from a complex set of factors, the dominant element of which was a period of internal comparative ekphrasis: that is, I compared one painting I could see in front of me with another that I had a very clear picture of in my mind's eye (because I had studied it in some detail and was very familiar with its details). It is through that internal "description" and comparison that the ideasthetic experience and its culmination comes about.

It is also at this point, however, that critical evaluations and descriptions of process become, for me as a creative writing practitioner, problematic. Much as critical conceptual terms help communicate experience, they are not (and can never be) a substitute for the experience itself. The "internal description and comparison" that I refer to above, for instance, took place at the time in the complete absence of any verbalisation: no words were involved, so in a strict sense, no ekphrasis was taking place.[9] Nevertheless, any attempt to communicate that internal comparison to others without words is impossible, and critical conceptual terms may augment and inform the very structures of meaning that inform ideasthetic experiences (and their representations) with richer and more nuanced understandings than may be possible without them. It is in that hope that I offer the explorations in this essay.

> On the right side aisle, affixed to the wall, were two large paintings, one of Jesus being laid in the tomb, one of Doubting Thomas. Both were modelled on Caravaggio's treatment of the subject, but the artist, John Granville Gregory, had rendered only Jesus in the shroud or robe of the time. The apostles were dressed in contemporary clothes: shirts, t-shirts, jackets in denim, leather and suede, a high-collared caban. The framing and the light, above and from the left, with skin highlights and deep shadow, were unmistakeably Caravaggio's. But the centre-parted haircuts, the denim shorts, the goatee and the Lennon spectacles were unerringly here and now.
>
> I felt, as I sometimes do, that I was supposed to see those paintings on that day. That could be nonsense, of course. But it might not be. In any case I moved from one painting to the other, standing in front of each for some time, until I settled in front of one. Still Doubting, the artist had called it.

[9] As Chomsky has noted, "everyone who introspects will know that much of [their] thinking doesn't involve language." Bryan Magee, *Talking Philosophy: Dialogues with Fifteen Leading Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 188.

I describe how I had once had a slight obsession with Caravaggio, had read biographies of his in supermarkets before work, and had studied high quality reproductions of his paintings in detail.

> I looked up at the 'new' Caravaggio and, like the previous day's events, it unnerved me still. Something didn't sit right, and it took me a while to understand what it was. It wasn't the craftsmanship. The painting, by any measure, was excellent. You could smell the old leather of Thomas' coat. Feel the stinging rawness in the wound in the new Christ's side. It was something else. Something gestural. The mornings I spent at Morrisons café lost in sixteenth century Rome and Naples and Malta and Sicily were not lost to me. Nor was the coffee table book my partner bought me when the biography became an obsession of sorts. I pored over those prints for hours, wiping fingertips to prevent smudges on the high gloss paper. I knew those paintings well. I could conjure them in my mind at will.

Here is a feeling of unease, a sensation caused by a comparative image not in front of me, but pulled from memory. (It is worth noting that in Buddhist phenomenology, there are six senses, with the sixth being the mind. Its sensory objects are the thoughts, feelings, emotions and perceptions which appear to the mind, such that this memory would be just as valid a sensory input as any smell in the room or light on canvas might be). The *unnerving* described here, the bodily discomfort felt, suggests an unconscious movement in the viewer towards the ideasthetic experience. And ekphrasis now comes into play, but a comparative ekphrasis, moving between memory and looking. As for the intense experiences of the previous few days, I could not have asked for a better preamble and setup to test out Brosch's assertion that '[t]he ekphrastic encounter can be used to stage a conflict or an attraction between unequal parts on the cultural inheritance of inequality.'[10]

> In Caravaggio's Doubting Thomas, Jesus is the youngest of the four figures in the painting by a margin of fifteen or twenty years. In John Granville Gregory's, they are all about the same age, late twenties, early thirties. In Caravaggio's work, Christ grips Thomas' hand with its filthy fingernails, and draws the index finger into the wound almost to the second joint. The surrounding skin wrinkles with the insertion and Thomas looks down, away, and slightly to the left. In Gregory's painting, Thomas is curious still, Christ's hands bloodied rather than pierced, the wound sealed, itchy healing and raw. Thomas, looking straight at the wound, is, as the artist named the painting, Doubting Still.

[10] Brosch, "Ekphrasis in the Digital Age: Responses to Image," , 225-243

Representing the ideasthetic experience of insight

By 'insight' here, I mean the apotheosis of ideasthetic experience: the moment every reader knows that comes at the end of a well-crafted short story, or a paragraph *engineered* by the writer to make you feel something, sense something, understand something, or, in the most memorable cases, all three at once. It is the moment a reader puts the book down and stares into space for a while. And it is here that the ideasthetic experience reaches its bodily-experienced apotheosis. Although this type of experience may be one that any person who has felt a deep connection with a work (or works) of art would recognise to a greater or lesser extent, it remains a difficult thing to communicate in the language of the academy. A fusion, a coming together takes place—of memory, association, experience, belief, emotion, predisposition, mood and attitude—with the artistic object(s) of attention, and there is coalescence.

> I think of a term from Buddhist psychology: *hri*. It has several meanings, but one refers to the feeling of healthy shame that is experienced when one knows one has done something wrong. Not beating yourself up with guilt, more like having a deep, emotional sense of having not lived up to your highest aspirations. It is considered a very healthy thing. I look at the new Caravaggio and remember the old. I think of my tour of the castle and of Susan's comment. I think of the reception the night before and the wall of singing men, the speeches and the poem. And I feel that Gregory landed on something important when he moved to paint Thomas as he did, and name his work as he did. Something about who we are now, and how we are now. How we are missing what Caravaggio's Thomas did not miss: that sense of healthy shame that makes him look down and away as Jesus pulls his hand into a still-gaping wound. Gregory's contemporary Thomas does not falter. Feels no shame. Points with his washed-clean modern hands at wounds that, though still raw and painful, have the appearance of something that is healing. And he touches. And he stares. Without shame. Still doubting.

Here is an attempt to render an internal experience, a moment of deep resonance and understanding, ideasthetically. If I over-emphasise the bodily experience, emotion or sensation, (Susan's anger, my joy at the choir singing, my present sense of shame) I fall off the ideasthetic tightrope. If I over-emphasise the meaning, the ideas that have contributed to shaping the experience and the explicit last few sentences interpreting small ekphrastic details, the same happens: down I go. So I sketch the picture, showing parts but not the whole. I give hints' and leave gaps. I step back, then give more hints. I refer back, and give time. And then slowly, I draw the rhythm of the piece to a close at what feels like the right moment, leaving the mind of the

resonant reader to do the work: to appreciate and come to know through an artistic, associative experience and not solely through a rational and reasoned experience (i.e. on a level which involves *but is not limited by*, both emotion and reason, both sensation and idea, both words and images) what I believe at that moment I appreciated and came to know.

What do I mean by resonant reader? I mean the reader with sufficient shared emotional experience to share the resonant meanings, the hints, the drawings-together that have gone before. (It is a rare writer who touches all readers all the time).

As described, the piece as a whole serves as an *ekphrasis* of insight, if you will allow me to imaginally stretch the meaning of the word. It is an attempt at a verbal representation of an ideasthetic *manifestation*, a description of what felt at the time like a steadily progressing sequence of mostly intuitive impressions (emotional, cognitive, verbal and sensory) that built up into a moment of coalescence, of coming together to catalyse a sense of understanding that includes but is not limited by any one of these impressions or dimensions of experience. In this chapter I have tried to describe in critical terms something which at the time of writing *felt* like an entirely subconscious, unwilled, unchosen experience. It was one of those writing sessions where there seemed to be very little decision-making going on: the words just arrived. As Prendergast puts it, I have tried here to examine 'alogical processes in a logical way […] processes that are deeply rooted in metaphorical associations based on webs of experiential knowledge.'[11] And these webs go deep, and are mostly unconscious.

Conclusion and discussion

The "ideasthetic experience" is a concept that describes a particular type of aesthetic/bodily/intellectual event or sequence of events which correspond to the apprehension of artistic quality and resonance. The concept is informed by ideasthesia balance theory as proposed by Danko Nikolić, and by Julia Prendergast's work on ideasthesia and creative writing. As explored in some detail in this chapter, ekphrastic techniques can be used profitably to both examine the origin of the ideasthetic experience in the writer, and to evoke (or at least point to) a similar experience in the reader.

It is perhaps worth noting here the effects of such seemingly small experiences of insight on my practice-as-research methodology. I initially

[11] Julia Prendergast, "Grinding the Moor - Ideasthesia and Narrative," *New Writing* 15, no. 4 (Oct 2, 2018), 416-432. doi:10.1080/14790726.2018.1436567. http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14790726.2018.1436567.

intended to take more of a social science approach to my interrogation of heritage discourse, and was still thinking along those lines when I went to Wales. In fact, some of the trip was taken up with carrying out formal interviews with a view to coding them later for quantitative analysis. But my experience of visiting the castle, and the experience of simply looking at behaviours and representations, and watching people, places and things, and *trusting my own fascinations* led to much richer and more interesting creative work than the outputs centred around formal interviews and statistical evaluation. My ideasthetic experience at Bangor Cathedral persuaded me to allow my own fascinations to guide me, whether those be buildings like old cathedrals, unusual paintings, or songs and poems sung by strangers in a language I cannot understand. A project that was initially to be about interviewing marginalised groups throughout the United Kingdom and comparing and evaluating their responses to "official" heritage discourses, has become an autobiographical project where I dig deep into the many areas of my own heritage where questions of decoloniality can be addressed. As a person born into a nationalist Northern Irish background wanting to interrogate contemporary ideas of heritage in Britain and Ireland, I decided to embark on a road trip around the United Kingdom in the weeks surrounding the British government's initially proposed Brexit date of the 31 October 2019. I let my reflections be informed explicitly by my own genetic, national, community, social, psychological and experiential heritage—and implicitly by dimensions of justice as outlined in the social cartographies of Vanessa Andreotti's *decolonial futures* project.[12]

As I travelled I stopped at art galleries, tracked down old friends, stood at bus-stops in the rain, visited remote ancestral castles twenty miles on foot from the nearest village, sought out the kinds of people, plans and events that often lead to happy accidents, and returned home after 45 days with 65000 words of notes and 3000 photographs.

The experience has convinced me to come back time and again to ekphrasis, and use its mediating, associative power to assist me in my intervention into the writing and storytelling that privilege state and heritage organisations' perspectives on what heritage is, which heritage stories matter, and how they should be told.

[12] https://decolonialfutures.net/

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Chapter Two

Looking for Mary Webb: Creating a Lost Diary

Rebecca Beattie

Abstract

Mary Webb wrote novels, essays and poems in the early Twentieth Century that explored folklore and the sacred qualities of nature. She received posthumous success during the countryside revival of the 1930s, and in the 1980s as Virago Press re-introduced her work to a new readership. Since then, Webb has gone largely forgotten and unstudied, and very few personal papers survived in the archives.

For my practice-led PhD in Creative Writing, I took inspiration from the life and work of Webb, to write a novel which sought to use imagination to fill the deep lacuna in the record, creating the fictional diary of Mary Webb. The critical element of the PhD explored the challenges I encountered in writing the diary and examined the process of resolving the difficulties of creating a fully formed character from a fractured record. In 2018 I was privileged to visit the most complete archive of Webb material in California, and was astounded at how much could be gleaned from interacting with the primary material. In this chapter, I will interrogate how we can use fiction to bridge the gaps in the record, and how rich the interaction can be between private collectors and creative writers. (200 words)

Keywords: Nature writing, Mary Webb, Fictional Diary

When reflecting on her work in progress about the life and death of Amy Dudley, Dr. Catherine Padmore wrote,

> Writing this dead woman is an attempt to raise her up and let her speak, all the while knowing this is an impossible task. It requires the dangerous

> assumption of empathy between bodies dislocated in time and place, and it risks inserting my voice into the space where Amy's used to be. [1]

Like Padmore, I have spent seven years writing a dead woman — the Shropshire writer, Mary Webb. My relationship with Webb stretches back to my teenage years, when I discovered her last completed novel, *Precious Bane*. Then, as now, the novel became a favourite – its pages were filled with the most exquisite nature descriptions, and the story was infused with witchcraft and folklore. Over time, my copy of *Precious Bane* has become a delicate treasure – its pages have softened and curled. It is dog-eared, full of notes in the margins and underlinings, and its spine is on the verge of collapse.

Returning to study Modern Literature as a mature student, I struggled to know where to place Webb amongst her peers. Webb is an enigma - an extraordinary woman, who steadfastly refused to follow some of the norms society attempted to impose at the turn of the Twentieth century, whilst in other ways she is considered by critics to be deeply old-fashioned. In her novels she tackles themes such as extra and pre-marital sex, rape, abortion and women's sexuality, she was a lifelong vegetarian and was vehemently opposed to blood sports, but critics tend to disregard her (at worst) or misplace her (at best). Michelle Barale comments, she is "a distinctly non-feminist author" as ultimately, "her heroines" most womanly act is submission to her lover"[2]. Webb is most frequently characterised as "romantic", for example, her Wikipedia entry states in the first line that she was an "English romantic novelist". While I am not suggesting that we use Wikipedia as an academic source, this is invariably how readers may initially encounter her– a brief search in Google for Mary Webb brings up this entry first on the list of sources. Too rural to be urban, too traditional to be feminist, too independent to want to follow a crowd, Walter de la Mare classed her as a "nature writer", which is more accurate, but she remains absent from most academic reading lists. Webb struggled to attract a public readership during her lifetime, although she was well regarded in the literary world. De la Mare noted that Webb's skill lay in her minute observations of nature, writing that,

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[1] Catherine Padmore, 'The Paradox of Writing the Dead: Voice, Empathy, and Authenticity in Historical Biofictions'. *Writing in Practice,* Vol. 3. (2017) p.1

[2] Michèle Aina Barale, *Daughters and Lovers: the life and writing of Mary Webb. (*Middletown, Connecticut, Westleyan University Press, 1986) p2.

> Her world was "a place of unbearable wonder", and she had senses almost microscopic in their delicacy. She could – most rewardful of feats – seize the momentary".[3]

She was hailed a genius by Rebecca West, and Stanley Baldwin, the Prime Minister of England, spoke of *Precious Bane* as being "one of the best books of its kind" he had ever read. He stated that the book's beauty lay in "its fusion of the elements of nature and man" and that, "one who reads some passage in Whitehall has almost the physical sense of being in the Shropshire cornfields"[4].

Sadly, Webb's fortunes changed posthumously in 1928, five months after her death. Baldwin gave a speech in praise of her at the Literary Fund dinner which was reported in *The Times.* The next day her obituary was printed which said that "she was probably at her death on the verge of making a great reputation"[5]. Webb immediately became a bestseller, and her publisher, Jonathan Cape and her husband, Henry Webb, were quick to capitalise on this. Illustrated editions of her novels were issued, along with anthologies, poetry collections, and a series of biographies, written to feed the newly emerging public desire for all things Mary Webb. This fame continued for several decades. At her death in 1927, Webb had been worth £90. Ten years later, the Mary Webb estate had increased to £37,000. The "brand" of Mary Webb, then, was a rich source of income.

Embarking on my work with Webb I knew I was setting myself a challenge. At a conference in 2014, I spent the first day enthusiastically introducing my topic, only to be met by a raised eyebrow or two, and responses of "Oh". By the second day, I felt like I had mistakenly been picked out in a line-up, when several people said to me, "Oh *you're* the one studying Mary Webb." Undaunted, at my next conference a year later, I declared that I was setting out to create a "living, breathing, fictional Mary Webb". As the lifelong keeper of a journal, I had decided I wanted to write my next novel in that form, so I began to write the fictional diary of Mary Webb. Like Padmore, I set out to raise up a dead woman, dislocated in time from me by a hundred years through the medium of biofiction. But the project has brought me several challenges, bestriding the gap between fiction and life-writing, and even the diary format itself is liminal, being placed between private and public. Writing my own private diary, an

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[3] Walter De La Mare, "Introduction" to Webb, Mary, *The Spring of Joy* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928) p15

[4] Stanley Baldwin, "Introduction" to Webb, Mary *Precious Bane (*London: Jonathan Cape, 1929) pp 10-11

[5] The Times, Friday, April 28th 1928, p21

activity I have maintained since the age of eleven, is very different to writing a public one.

It can be argued that all writing, even the most private journals, have a reader in mind, even if it is simply the author herself or a covert reader, discovering the diary like hidden treasure in a forgotten trunk in an attic. There are, however, as Elizabeth Podnieks points out, some limitations when working within the boundaries of a diary as opposed to a novel or an autobiography:

> There is no dispute that the autobiography and the novel are intentionally written for a public audience. Even the letter, no matter how confidential, has an external addressee. Of all the literary genres, the diary is the only one that, to be managed "authentically", must be written with no consideration of an audience beyond the writer herself. [6]

One of the challenges of writing a literary form that, on the outside at least, is intended to be "private", the "invisible" reader of a fictionalised diary must be able to follow "the story" – they must be able to be carried along by the narrative so that they understand who the major players are. Inscribing the private-as-public presents the author with another set of problems. In order to give the reader enough background information they must (to a certain extent) step out from behind the private veil and address their readers that (by artifice) shouldn't really be there. The invisible reader must be given enough detail to be able to follow a narrative, what Kuhn-Osius calls "consequential materials"[7] but in a form that doesn't acknowledge their presence.

Also, most crucial of all, it's essential to find a strong, believable narrative voice that the reader will be willing to follow through the novel. In effect, I have attempted to step into the skin of a real woman, to examine her story from the inside looking out, whilst maintaining a story that is true to the facts of Webb's life, and here I encountered my most significant problem. For someone who enjoyed so much posthumous success, little remains of Webb's inner thoughts, besides her novels, a collection of nature essays, her poems and a small collection of letters held in an archive at Stanford University. Webb's lexical footprint is very small, and the evidence trail is sparse. Dr. Gladys Coles, Webb's principle biographer, reports that the deep lacuna in the record of Webb's life was partly due to

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[6] Elizabeth Podnieks, Daily Modernism: the literary diaries of Virginia Woolf, Antonia White, Elizabeth Smart, and Anaïs Nin. Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000) p17-18

[7] K Eckhard Kuhn-Osius, 'Making Loose Ends Meet: Private Journals in the Public Realm' *The German Quarterly,* Vol 54, No. 2 (March 1981) p 168

her poverty, and that whilst in the process of selling Mary's last and only surviving manuscript to a book dealer, her husband Henry, told the man that,

> "All the other manuscripts were burnt. They took up too much room in the tiny cottage, and, besides, they made a splendid fire which lasted a long time".

Coles surmises that "the truth of it was that Henry and Mary had been in such dire straits financially that the papers were used for fuel"[8].

However, writing that scene in my novel led me to posit there may have been something more unpleasant at play. This was the extract as I originally wrote it,

> 13th October 1924, Hampstead
>
> The Grove is somewhat bleak at present. I have limited the amount of hours I spend in the house due to the need to heat the place, so instead I go out and wander the streets and the Heath, keeping myself occupied as much as possible, and then return in time to light a small fire to welcome Henry home from school. So far this week we have burned our way through letters and manuscripts a plenty, since we have no other fuel. I felt a pang as we did so, but Henry tried to cheer me with,
>
> "Never mind, Mary. They do get a good fire up!" and I realised it was the most cheerful I had seen him in a while. And at least we can be warm then.

My supervisory committee immediately pointed out a large hole in the tale, since paper burning, even in manuscript quantities, is unlikely to burn long enough to heat a house. While the biographers have never questioned Henry's assertion that Webb's papers were burned for fuel, I concluded that he may have had more nefarious motives. Perhaps Henry was attempting to obscure why he might have purposefully attenuated his first wife's written inner life? It is not uncommon for husbands to have "censored" their wives' words when they objected to what had been written—Samuel Pepys did it (and then wrote about it in his own diary) and Thomas Hardy did it. But it also enabled me to posit that Webb *could* have kept a diary – there is no evidence either way.

My first discovery through the writing of the diary was that, when writing fiction, it is possible to draw conclusions that might otherwise be missed, because the level of fictional "reality" required to keep a reader in flow with the narrative, is more enveloping than some styles of non-fiction.

[8] Gladys Mary Coles, *The Flower of Light* (Tiptree: Duckworth, 1979) p313.

In the Reith Lectures broadcast on Radio 4, Hilary Mantel has spoken on the depth of detail required to create historical fiction. She advises,

> Research is not a separate phase from writing. There is no point where the writer can say, "I know enough." Writing a novel is not like building a wall. Your preparatory stage is about digging deep, understanding context, and evolving a total world picture. The activity is immersive. The novelist is after a type of knowledge that goes beyond the academic. She is entering into a dramatic process with her characters, and until she plunges into a particular scene, she hardly knows what she needs to know.[9]

Writing historical fiction, then, requires a similar approach to research that an academic project might undertake, while bringing the story (and the characters) alive to the reader. Those facts must be blended with a depth of feeling and sensory experience in order to carry the reader through the narrative, and this is a crucial element to fiction. When I was writing my novel, this then became the source of my most major challenge—how to create a speculative diary which was constructed around what facts we do know, whilst creating a story that is engaging to the reader.

So how does a writer in Twenty First century London create a living, breathing, fictional rendering of a woman, when that person has been (to all intents and purposes) erased from the record? This is the moment in which creativity, weed-like, has to blossom in the cracks of the record, but it has taken some coaxing to enable that to happen. Taking a layered approach to the writing, my rendering of Webb emerged from an accretion of elements. The temporal framework came from the biographies; however, I still needed to step into her imaginative body and glean the level of detail required for a diary. The biographical portrayals of Webb vary wildly, depending how much involvement Henry had in their writing. To some earlier biographers she was an emotionally turbulent older woman who latched onto her naïve younger husband, to later ones she was a woman out of time, living at odds with a world that didn't understand or value her sensitivity.

I turned to her novels to locate another layer. Reading and re-reading each one in detail allowed me to take on something of her language patterns, what sensory system she favoured, and what her values were. They also gave little hints at key moments of her life, as she translated scenes from her own life into fiction. For instance, the couple's decision to leave Shropshire after their marriage, a separation which was to haunt Webb for the rest of her brief life, appears in the plot of her third novel, *The House in Dormer Forest*. When Webb's own words ran dry, I immersed myself in the 1920s,

[9] Hilary Mantel *The Reith Lectures*. London: BBC Radio 4, 2017. Radio.

branching out to her contemporaries to ensure I could situate her amongst other writers who loved nature – Thomas Hardy, D.H. Lawrence, Elizabeth von Arnim, and also writers who kept a diary – Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Mary Butts. From wider reading of the period, I gleaned a sense of what the author David Mitchell has termed as "bygonese" – words and phrases that were rooted in the turn of the last century, to complement the layers of temporal details. [10]

When I turned to Webb's private correspondence, the archives are sparse, but they gave me a tantalizing glimpse into what might have been a rich body of work. There were some surviving personal letters at Stanford University, written to her future Mother-in-law in 1911, which reveal some details of her life before her marriage. Webb writes of dawn excursions with her mother to go bird-nesting, in which she says they went,

> Just to look in the nests, not to take anything of course. I love being out when the birds have not yet been awake long enough to get shy and frightened. They look out at us with curiosity, not fear. The day does not yet belong to man.

And she continues,

> Scrambling in the hedgerows becomes an ordeal for one's skirts and is apt to make one's shoes muddy and wet, but the expedition was well worth the effort.

There was a lightness of tone to the letters that did not always translate into Webb's novels or poetry. When her engagement to Henry was announced, Henry's family cut off all further contact with her, as they objected to the marriage, and there were no further surviving letters that might shed some more light on this most complex situation.

Webb suffered from Graves' Disease, a condition of the thyroid, but this also started to help me to fill in some of the gaps between us. Her doctors prescribed quiet time in nature which meant she spent long periods outdoors, allowing her time to practice those "microscopic" skills of observation that de la Mare wrote of, and this was a practice which was to influence her writing process. Nature took on a multi-layered significance for Webb – it became a mirror, reflecting the emotional currents of her characters, and she used landscape as an organizing structure in her novels. Locations had agency – a formation of rocks that bears down on one

[10] David Mitchell, "David Mitchell on Historical Fiction", *The Telegraph,* 8th May 2010 [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/bookreviews/7685510/David-Mitchell-on-Historical-Fiction.html] Accessed 4th October 2017

protagonist, haunting his dreams; a mere that manifests the ghost of a dead lover to torment another. And Webb took her love of nature one step further - she was also a nature mystic. Webb developed the extraordinary process of meditating in the outdoors for long periods in a state of altered consciousness. Field workers reported seeing her on their way to work in the morning. When they returned at the end of the day, she would still be in the same position, having barely moved. This was then followed by periods of intense activity when she returned to waking consciousness with a fully formed novel in her head, which then had to be written in a frenzy. Using this method, according to her biographers, her first novel was completed in three weeks.

For another layer of polish, I turned to our shared love of nature, and to her nature mysticism as this infused everything she wrote. Webb described nature as a doorway that opens consciousness, allowing communion with a divine force, and one that inspired her to write. In a 1911 essay, she wrote,

> One violet is as sweet as an acre of them. And it often happens--as if by a kindly law of compensation--that those who have only one violet find the way through its narrow, purple gate into the land of God, while many who walk over dewy carpets of them do not so much as know that there is a land or a way. [11]

I needed to immerse myself in nature, to draw on that level of detail, but I had another big impediment. While I grew up in an intensely rural setting and rely on time in nature to reflect, my own writing methods are very different to Webb's. Altered consciousness inspired by nature is not practical on the London underground in rush hour where I write. I experimented with meditation in nature, but while London has green spaces, it lacks the solitude required to drift away like Webb did. Using walking as a form of "moving meditation", I began to go out very early in the morning and to keep another diary, one in which I noted what was blooming in the gardens, or the hedgerows or the woodland around me, rooting my own writing deep within the structures of modern day nature immersion. These descriptions allowed me to connect my own writing to Webb's, gave me an organizing structure of my own, which is then (I hope) evocative of Webb's own style, without resorting to pastiche. I walked the paths that she walked, both in Shropshire and London, merging my descriptions with hers. While I fully acknowledge that I am, no doubt, inserting my voice into the space where Webb's used to be, we reached a place where this seemed to work. That is, after all the job of the writer, and I don't think she would mind this

[11] Mary Webb, "The Joy of Fragrance", *The Spring of Joy* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1946) p2

process. The narrative became a fusion of both our voices - more Modernist than mine, and yet more contemporary than hers.

Bemoaning the loss of Webb's archives also comes with a tale of a little miracle. They don't happen very often, but when they do, I believe they need to be shared. I had found that there were only a small number of archives available about Webb in the UK – some books in the stack at Senate House or the British Library refer to her or include a chapter about her. There is also an archive in Shropshire which holds some resources – type-written manuscript remembrances about Webb and her family from her nephew. The number of primary source papers is relatively tiny. But then, late in my research, a chance email to an archivist at Stanford University opened a portal. Frustrated at the lack of material I had found in the UK, I had been reliant on a digital archive at Stanford for some brief glimpses into Webb's life – those letters to her mother-in-law which stopped abruptly when her engagement to Henry Webb was announced; business correspondence to the editors of some of the journals she wrote for later in her life; as well as letters from Henry pertaining to the management of the estate following Webb's death. On writing to the archivist to ask permission to reproduce one of the letters, my email was passed to the owners of the material, Bruce and Mary Crawford. We began talking, and then they invited me to California to meet the material in person.

There are more volumes in the Crawford's archive than are available in the UK Archives combined. This repository is the result of Mary Crawford's thirty-year project to collect Webb, reuniting the material that Henry had sold on Mary Webb's death. Visiting the archive enabled me to assess significant amounts of material that was not considered by previous studies of Webb, such as her short stories and the reviewing work she carried out for various journals. I was able to read the series of articles Webb wrote for *The Bookman* between 1923 and her death in 1927, as well as some of her most interesting correspondence that goes alongside it. This enabled me to piece together some of the finer details of Webb's life – who she interacted with, who she read, what she thought of them. For example, one of the items of treasure is Webb's most emotionally turbulent letter, written to a friend, Mrs. C.A. Nicholson.

The letter is dated simply "December 4th". The description in the Stanford electronic archive states the following:

> Mary Webb. Autograph letter signed, December 4 [1926], to an unnamed addressee [C. A. Nicholson], four pages on one folded leaf. In this impassioned (indeed, remarkable) letter, Webb insists that she cannot be friends with Nicholson, as "the fact of your saying what you did to a complete stranger shows that we have nothing in common." Webb says of

> herself: "When I have succeeded in getting paid fairly by the British public for my work, I shall naturally have the best treatment I can get. But not till then. Also, it is less treatment that I want than ordinary good food and a suitable amount of rest and exercise. I have this week existed on bread & scrape & tea." Webb then complains that her late mother's executor is trying to defer payment of trust money owed to her because "he wants me to stop getting on as he & most of my relations hate my books. They are conventional & religious people." Webb writes in a postscript at a right angle in the letter's margin: "You'll think it strange that I have a telephone when I am poor, but it is my only help, if I didn't have it I couldn't go on." [12]

The Nicholson letter is one that is frequently quoted by biographers, particularly when they wish to emphasise Webb's emotional capriciousness. The letter shows signs of Webb's agitation – the cursive script gets harder and harder to read as the letter goes on, and as Webb begins to fill up the margins of the page, the words become more and more untidy. On first examination, it is easy to be side-tracked by Webb's comments about not being paid fairly by the British public, which frankly, makes her sound arrogant. However, by piecing together other evidence, it is the reference to Webb's illness that struck me as significant. Graves' disease is an illness of the thyroid, which we now know leads to emotional turbulence in its sufferers. An examination of Webb's articles for *The Bookman* reveal a further detail to the relationship with Nicholson that seems to have been played out rather more publicly than the letter. In a review of Mrs C.A. Nicholson's collection of short stories, *The Dancer's Cat*, published in the December 1925 edition of *The Bookman*, Webb writes,

> Mrs Nicholson shows a tendency to develop a "disease complex", having one or two people sick in every book. This made *The Dawn Fulfilled* very painful. If one is well, it is not necessary to brood about sickness. If one is ill, it is suicidal to do so." [13]

I have therefore concluded that the letter was dated 12 months earlier than thought, placing it in 1925, and relates to Webb writing quite this cutting review of her friend's collection of stories. And it appears that Webb did not take kindly to expressions of concern about her health, or questions about how well she was "looking after herself". Even Webb's obituary in *The Times*, printed five months after her actual death, refers to her personality, citing that,

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[12] Mary Crawford, (2010) http://marywebb.stanford.edu/contacts/18530/ [Accessed 2nd October 2018]

[13] Mary Webb, 'A Will-O-The-Wisp From the Steppes', *The Bookman*, December 1925, pp178-179.

> Mrs. Webb is described as having been very highly strung, and it is even said that, being dissatisfied with her last book she threw the MS. Into the fire. [14]

The letters and articles also show that Webb was a working writer, interacting with London literary life, and it shows in her work. Like Thomas Hardy, Webb thought of herself first and foremost as a poet[15], which required her to be measured and precise in her placement of words, while her novels are frequently criticised for being full of emotional outpourings, a quality which Stella Gibbons most famously parodied in *Cold Comfort Farm.* However, the short stories published around this time show a more measured and Modernist Webb. Her wit is evident throughout, another quality which is not always evident in her longer fiction either.

Seeing the Crawford archive also allowed me to reach some different conclusions about accepted events in Webb's life. For example, going back to the Webb's apparent love of burning things, and that quote from the Times in Webb's obituary. Webb's biographers, along with the Times, all report that Webb, suffering from a fit of pique and writer's block, threw the manuscript for her final, unfinished novel, *Armour Wherein He Trusted* in the fire at her home in Hampstead. In her 1979 biography, *The Flower of Light*, Gladys Mary Coles describes the scene thus:

> The manuscript of *Armour Wherein He Trusted* only just survived: there are "marks of fire on the whole MS" and "the beginnings of a tear across the notebook" – the visible signs of Mary's distraught attempt to destroy the book. During September 1927, ill, weak, desperately unhappy, she despaired of ever writing any more of the novel; one evening, overwrought and depressed, she tried to tear up the manuscript but did not have sufficient strength to rip it across, so hurled it on to the fire. Then, greatly distressed, she rushed from the room and telephoned St. John Adcock in whom she had recently confided her troubles.
>
> Adcock related later that she began by telling him how unwell she had been, but interrupted herself: "I have destroyed all had done on the new novel" to his surprised "Good Lord, whatever made you do that?" there was no immediate answer as she was weeping: Adcock had "seldom heard anything more piteous that the subdued, broken sound of her crying at the other end of the line." When she spoke again, it was in a stricken voice, and "she blamed herself miserably" but said she had "felt so dissatisfied, felt that she

[14] *The Times*, Friday, April 28th 1928, p21.
[15] Mary E. Crawford & Bruce J. Crawford, *Mary Webb: Neglected Genius.* New York, The Grollier Club.
2009) p168.

> could not finish it and would never write any more so, on a sudden impulse had torn it and put it on the fire". She did not know that Henry and retrieved the scorched papers from the flames. [16]

A friend of mine is an Historian, and she always advises me, "Go back to the source. Always return to the source material" When I held the manuscript for *Armour Wherein He Trusted* in my hand, I began to understand what my friend meant. The manuscript itself is beautiful. It exists in two parts - a red covered bound notebook, and a pile of foolscap pages, all written in fountain pen or in pencil. Webb has pasted little pictures in the cover of things that were themes for her in writing– a posy of wildflowers, an illustration of bees, a medieval illustration of the preaching scene in a churchyard. There are clear visible signs of Webb having torn the first few pages –the corners show the lightning scar of a tear that has been taped up with sticky tape. But the burning? If Webb did throw the manuscript on the fire, it must have been unlit or dying at the time, since the damage from the fire on the manuscript is minimal, despite those accounts that said there were visible signs of burning throughout. At page 49, the corners of the pages begin to show singe marks, but they are minimal.

I will end on the words of Hilary Mantel, who gives the same advice as my friend the historian. "Facts are strong, but they are not stable." she writes. She continues:

> Soon you find your sources are riddled with contradiction, and that even when the facts are agreed, their meaning often isn't. At this stage, you will want to seek out the earliest evidence you can get. If your story tracks real events, you will spend a lot of time sifting versions, checking discrepancies, assessing the status of evidence: always asking, who is telling me this, and why does he want me to believe it? [17]

If you can sift through the discrepancies, Mantel concludes,

> The contradictions can be fertile. If you can locate the area of doubt, that's where you go to work. You may well consult original documents, and you will tramp over the ground, and visit the libraries, and allow your hand to hover over a document and imagine the hand that first wrote it. [18]

Holding Mary Webb's own notebooks in my hand, I could feel exactly what Mantel and my historian both meant.

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[16] Gladys Mary Coles, *The Flower of Light* (Tiptree: Duckworth, 1979) p313-4
[17] Hilary Mantel *The Reith Lectures*. London: BBC Radio 4, 2017. Radio.
[18] Hilary Mantel *The Reith Lectures*. London: BBC Radio 4, 2017. Radio.

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CHAPTER THREE

POETRY AND POTATOES: A RHIZOMATIC APPROACH TO TEACHING CREATIVE WRITING AND LITERATURE

ROWAN MIDDLETON

Abstract

The approach to teaching discussed here engages with literary texts as part of a rhizome that includes places, people, and other texts such as letters, diaries, and life writing. The emphasis on place as part of the rhizome is developed through field trips to locations connected with the texts, including museums, landscapes, and archives, which can help deepen students' relationship with the subject. Using creative writing to respond to the rhizome enables students to learn through the practice of writing, while simultaneously adding their own contribution to the rhizome. This approach can enrich students' understanding of a subject, and help build a relationship with it in the manner of Parker Palmer's idea of a circle of truth. The chapter describes how this approach has been used on a course on the Dymock Poets, whose heterogeneous output and existing rhizome of related texts make it particularly appropriate. Nonetheless, this approach can be applied in other contexts, and the chapter also describes how it has been used on a course that focuses on 19th century American literature.

Keywords: rhizome, pedagogy, Edward Thomas, Robert Frost, 19th century American literature, community of truth

> In the morning we all turned up on the Frost' "lot" with potato forks; the rows were divided among us […] The only indolent member of the outfit was Robert, who smoking blandly, strolled up and down the patch, a self-appointed overseer of cheap labour; while with sleeves rolled up and sweat pouring down we forked our allotted rows. We stopped only for cups of tea

> in a corner of the ground, and as we finished, one by one downed forks. The mounds of earthy spuds lay exposed among the fallen haulms like a gold-digger's nuggets encrusted with quartz.[1]

It is summer 1914 and Robert Frost is supervising his visitors in the garden of his cottage in the Gloucestershire village of Dymock. He had arrived there earlier that year to join fellow poets Lascelles Abercrombie and Wilfrid Gibson, and, until they moved away during the First World War, their presence caused the village to become one of the most significant places in the United Kingdom for the development of poetry in English. Their visitors included the poets Edward Thomas and Rupert Brooke, the poetry impresario Edward Marsh, and the poet and self-styled supertramp W. H. Davies. Another visitor was the poet and children's author Eleanor Farjeon, whose passage quoted above forms part of the body of work that has been created in response to the poets' lives and writing. Other writers who have added to this tradition include Nick Dear, author of the play *The Dark Earth and the Light Sky* (2012), and Deryn Rees-Jones, whose *And You, Helen* (2014) offers a poetic response to the life and work of Thomas' wife. Other examples include the anthology *Elected Friends: Poems For and About Edward Thomas* (1991), and *Branch-Lines: Edward Thomas and Contemporary Poetry* (2007) which contains poems and reflections by 55 poets including Seamus Heaney and Geoffrey Hill. The way in which new texts such as these have grown outwards from the Dymock Poets can be seen as an example of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome, which spreads out under the ground in all directions, sending up a potentially endless number of shoots. Although they are technically tubers, Deleuze and Guattari view potatoes as rhizomatic, along with animal burrows, which are noted for encompassing many different functions such as storerooms and escape routes.[2] The corresponding characteristics of heterogeneity and multiplicity enable a wider range of interrelated texts to form part of a literary rhizome. In addition to poetry, the Dymock Poets' writing encompasses short stories, children's literature, criticism, travel writing, letters, life writing, and nature writing. When designing an undergraduate course on the Dymock Poets, I wanted an approach that recognised the rhizomatic nature of their output and the related texts, as well as the way in which this is connected to place and the interrelatedness of the poets' lives. This was achieved by engaging with a wider range of literary genres than usual, going on a field trip to

[1] Eleanor Farjeon. *Edward Thomas: The Last Four Years*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 89.
[2] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013 [1987]), 5.

Dymock, and working with material held in the University of Gloucestershire archives. The assessment was designed so students could write a critical essay on an aspect of the poets, or a creative response. Offering this choice was particularly appreciated by the joint honours literature and creative writing students on the course, with the option to write a creative response giving students the opportunity to add their own contribution to the rhizome of related texts. While the rhizomatic approach outlined here is particularly suited to the Dymock Poets, it can be adapted for other contexts, and this chapter also discusses its use on a course that focuses on 19th century American literature.

Incorporating the opportunity to write a creative response to the texts is concomitant with a growing interest in combining creative writing with other disciplines, including medicine, accounting, and architecture.[3] Dianne Donnelly points to hybridization and cross-pollination as ways in which creative writing could be developed and reimagined, citing collaborations with media, art and science.[4] Literary studies might appear to have more obvious connections, as demonstrated by the joint creative writing and English literature programs that are offered at many universities in the United Kingdom. Despite this apparent closeness, Lauri Ramey notes that the two disciplines tend to be divided ideologically into those who produce, and those who study literature.[5] While Ramey was writing some time ago, the lines between the disciplines are still very much in evidence; even on a joint program most courses on offer will be discipline specific. There can be good reasons for this, such as the limitations on staff expertise, or the need for students to develop discipline specific skills. Nevertheless, there can also be benefits for bringing the disciplines together into what Ramey

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[3] Virginia S. Cowen, Diane Kaufman, and Lisa Schoenherr. "A Review of Creative and Expressive Writing As a Pedagogical Tool in Medical Education." Medical Education 50, no. 3 (2016): 311-19. doi:10.1111/medu.12878.
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[4] Dianne Donnelly. "Reshaping Creative Writing: Power And Agency in the Academy", in Donnelly, Dianne, and Harper, Graeme (eds.) Key Issues in Creative Writing. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2013. pp. 3-29.

[5] Lauri Ramey. "Creative Writing and English Studies: Two Approaches to Literature" (Creative Writing and Professionalism: Sheffield Hallam University/English Subject Centre, 2001), 5.

refers to as a "blended space".[6] Lynn Z. Bloom argues that learning about literature through writing encourages students to become invested in their own writing and that of their peers in ways they might not have previously imagined.[7] One of the reasons for this is that becoming a writer as well as a reader means that students can learn about literature from the inside out.[8] Patricía Garcia describes how students who responded to literary texts on a Spanish course she designed developed greater motivation to read independently and an increased interest in writing in both Spanish and their native tongue.[9] Garcia suggests that the act of constructing meaning involves making rhizomatic connections with other texts, with a reader's affective response to a text being essential to the process of writing a new text.[10]

This relational element was also evident on the Dymock course, where I found that students often chose to respond to a text they found interesting or felt an affinity for. Several students were inspired by Farjeon's description of a cider supper in which she claimed to have drunk all the poets of Gloucestershire under the table. Another student who was interested in children's literature wrote a new story in the style of the stories in Thomas' book for children *Four and Twenty Blackbirds*. Visiting the University of Gloucestershire archives offered another opportunity to develop an affective engagement with the poets and their work. Materials such as the draft of a poem written on wartime Salvation Army notepaper, letters from the trenches, or postcards from Dymock helped us gain a deeper understanding of the poets' lives and relationships, and how these affected their artistic development. The visit also introduced students to the potential of archival research, with several returning independently to work on material for their assignments. One particularly inventive assignment by Beka Moran imagines Thomas as a soldier in Afghanistan during the post 9/11 conflict. The writing takes the form of emails that echo the real letters written by Thomas to his mother, Frost, and his wife, Helen. Here is part of one of the emails to Helen:

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[6] Ibid., 9.

[7] Lynn Z. Bloom. *Composition Studies as a Creative Art*. (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1998), 58.

[8] Ibid., 57.

[9] Patricia García. "The Rhizome Text: Implementing an Intertextual Affective Approach to L2 Spanish Writing." New Writing 13, no. 1 (2016): 17-29. DOI: 10.1080/14790726.2015.1131302, 24.

[10] Ibid., 19.

> Love,
>
> I didn't get a reply... but I'll add a bit more.—the pace is slowing down today.
>
> Still not a Laughing Dove—but many magpies.
>
> Love, you can't ask me to tell you much more. I know that you have to say a lot more because you feel a lot more. But I mustn't feel anything, you see. It's as if I'm behind one of the 30ft blast walls and my sensible subconscious tells me not to think about the sunrise. I'll see the sunrise on the other side of the wall. Honestly, this isn't just the result of me thinking; it's just an explanation of my state of mind, so pre-occupied with being able to get over the wall that you could say I've forgotten that there's a sunrise on either side, before or after this business.[11]

The innovative spatial and temporal transposition clearly draws on a knowledge and understanding of Thomas' concerns and writing style. This is evident in the final sentence, which perfectly captures the qualifications that are so characteristic of Thomas' writing. The email also contains something of the emotional fragility expressed by Thomas in both his letters and poetry, with a resonance between the "30ft blast walls" of Camp Bastion, and Thomas' poem "[I Built Myself a House of Glass]", where the barrier is both protective and isolating:

> I built myself a house of glass:
> It took my years to make it:
> And I was proud. But now, alas!
> Would God someone would break it.
>
> But it looks too magnificent.
> No neighbour casts a stone
> From where he dwells, in tenement
> Or palace of glass, alone.[12]

In real life, Thomas' biography is notable for a number of close friendships, despite Farjeon's assertion that people had to "meet him more than half-way".[13] Thomas' friendships with both Farjeon and Frost were significant

[11] Beka Moran. "We are now in the thick of it." *The Journal of the Friends of the Dymock Poets*, no.19 (2020), 49.
[12] Edward Thomas. *Collected Poems*. (London: Ingpen and Grant, 1922), 101.
[13] Eleanor Farjeon. *Edward Thomas: The Last Four Years*, x.

in the development of his poetry. As a reviewer, Thomas recognised the innovations that Frost was introducing in collections such as *North of Boston*. In turn, Frost recognised the nascent poetry in Thomas' prose works about the countryside. Karl Rutherford chose to write a scene from a play which dramatizes one of Frost and Thomas' walks in the countryside around Dymock:

EDWARD:	No that's a pigeon. You should stick to listening. What is that Davies teaching you?
ROBERT:	(laughs) Yeah, I am frightened of what that man is teaching my children. He's quite happy to share his activities undertaken with ladies of the night.
EDWARD:	He can be quite vulgar in his tales I've heard, but, I'm afraid he doesn't know a buzzard from a bosom.
ROBERT:	I thought I heard one. Are we going to walk a long distance today?
EDWARD:	You did hear one. Hear that?
ROBERT:	You have a good ear for sounds. One of the reasons I admire your critique (beat) we have similar views on sound.

By dramatizing the poets' developing friendship, the scene identifies the different gifts they had to offer each other and the shared interests in sound and the natural world that inform their poetry. In doing so, the scene emphasises the relational aspect of literary creation, acknowledging the connections with people, place, and the natural world that are found in the Dymock rhizome. In addition to the birds that are so important in the extract above, the scene has Frost and Thomas mention the daffodils that Dymock is famous for, as well as May Hill, a distinctive local landmark on which Thomas began writing his poem 'Words'. We visited Dymock as part of the course with Richard Simkin, the Chair of the Friends of the Dymock Poets. He showed us round the little museum in the village church, before guiding us to some of the houses where the poets lived. We also walked out into the countryside around Dymock, and created an improvised performance in which we took it in turns to read some of the poems in one of the fields by the River Leadon. The embodied and sensory dimensions to a visit such as this are important; we felt the mud beneath our boots when walking through fields, saw the trees and houses, and listened to birds and the wind in the leaves. Such experiences were invaluable for those students writing creative assignments that were set in Dymock. The experiential dimension of the visit also gave us an opportunity to deepen our relationship with the place and its position as part of the rhizome that connects the poets and their writing.

There were also students who chose the option of writing a critical essay for their assignment, such as Monica Dunkley, who chose to focus on the life writing of Helen Thomas. Thomas' books *As it Was* and *World Without End* describe many moments of joy in her relationship with Edward, as well as the times when his "brooding melancholy" shut her out like an exile.[14] In one particularly harrowing episode, Edward hints at suicide and leaves the house, leaving Helen to wait up anxiously for his return.[15] Dunkley's assignment examined the complexity inherent in Helen's position as an exceptionally supportive wife and mother, who nonetheless had a progressive outlook, and whose frank and intimate portrayal of her relationship with Edward caused something of a scandal. Dunkley also paid attention to the literary status of Helen's work in its own right:

> Perhaps this is why, sadly, her writing hasn't been taken seriously. It may be considered too exclusively private and personal, detached perhaps from society. Her "voice" is the same in her books as it is in her numerous letters; her style is not formulaic or academic. She writes in a smooth colloquial tone about the people and things she loves: long walks in the country, their home, her difficult marriage with Edward, her loneliness. You can almost imagine sitting with Helen in her kitchen and listening to her telling you her story.

The area of literary reputation fits less comfortably with the anarchic and egalitarian nature of the rhizome, which Deleuze and Guattari contrast with the more hierarchical structure they see in the root systems of trees. The literary world's emphasis on comparison and evaluation means that writers who are read and studied the most occupy the top of the tree, while the unread and forgotten are relegated to the lower branches. This is nonetheless subject to different viewpoints, and changes over time, something that is evident in the case of the Dymock Poets. While poets such as Gibson and Abercrombie were well-known poetic names in 1914, they are now far less visible than Frost and Thomas. Approaching the poets as elements of a rhizome meant that we looked at all of them regardless of their place in the canon. Subsequent discussions about the reasons for the shifts in literary appraisal led to debates about whether these were justified, and raised issues about how literary values are formed and evolve. Providing the opportunity for students to discuss the reasons for this, and to articulate their own positions encouraged students to grow and develop as literary critics. Writing about work neglected by the literary establishment also helps students break new ground in their research at undergraduate level. Seeing

[14] Helen Thomas. *As it Was and World Without End*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1956 [1926 and 1931]), 47.
[15] Ibid., 149.

my students as researchers and literary critics aligns my teaching approach to Palmer's idea of a community of truth. This model does not remove the expert, but places them amongst other "knowers" in a circle around the subject, enabling knowers to build relationships with each other, and also with the subject being studied.[16] This forms a rhizome in that each knower is related directly to each other and the subject. Palmer does not seek to eliminate the role of the educator; instead their expertise is placed at the service of the subject, rather than themselves, and in doing so contributes to the shared endeavour of discovery.[17] The community of truth is not limited to the classroom, but expands to include everyone who is engaged with a particular subject. The fluidity between those active within a course and the wider circle of writers and scholars was made apparent when I worked with two students to prepare their assignments for publication in the *Journal of the Friends of the Dymock Poets.*

While the rhizome of the Dymock Poets is particularly suited to the teaching approach outlined so far, it can also be applied in other areas. An example of this is a course I was asked to teach on 19th century writing from the United States. While there are obvious differences in the scope of this subject, there is still a connection with place, albeit on a different scale, and there is also a wider rhizome of available texts that can be incorporated. As with the Dymock course, I wanted to find a way for students to contribute to the rhizome themselves. For regulatory reasons, this course had to have two assignments, so I changed the first one to a project where students were asked to respond to a course text using the perspective of a real or fictional 19th century character. The response could take the form of a letter, book review, diary, newspaper article, or speech. The aim was to invite students to deepen their relationship with the texts, and gain a fuller sense of what it was like to live in America during the period. All students took this assignment, although it had a lower weighting than the second critical assignment, allowing students to take risks without being too concerned about how this might affect their overall mark. To support this task, I brought in copies of 19th century American letters, diary entries, and newspaper articles, which we analysed and discussed. One was an article from the *Valley Spirit* about a young woman who had eloped with a black man to Canada:

> The father is rich, and the girl and [sic] heiress, which makes it very nice for the African of her choice. The matter has caused an intense excitement in

[16] Parker J. Palmer. *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).
[17] Ibid., 136.

> the neighborhood where the parties are well known, the girl having been born and brought up where her parents reside. It is difficult to imagine any train of circumstances by which a young and intelligent girl could be brought to form a connexion so repugnant to all the senses; yet the fact exists. [18]

The emotive use of language attests to the strength of the ingrained prejudice associated with racial oppression, while also exhibiting a gossipy fascination with the affair and the breaking of social codes. A subsequent article comments gleefully on the young woman's separation from her husband and return to the United States with her brother.[19] Other texts included love letters, and articles about the new railways, emancipation, and spitting in church. Students appreciated the human elements of these texts, which augmented the literary texts by expanding students' awareness of historical issues. Many of the students had never experienced a task like this, and the letters and articles were helpful in providing models to work with. They also gave students a sense of how people wrote in the 19th century, enabling them to employ an appropriate writing style in their own work.

Financial and time constraints meant that a trip to America was not possible, but we did visit the American Museum in Bath, in Somerset, England. We saw a reconstructed tavern from Massachusetts, and walked through rooms that were curated to reflect different periods in American history. We also saw exhibitions of settler rugs, folk art, and Native American beadwork. Trips such as this can enhance a community of truth by strengthening the relationship between student and subject, in this case by coming into contact with physical artefacts. A shared experience beyond the classroom can also help to strengthen the relationships between students. Being immersed in the culture of the period for a day was also helpful for gathering ideas for the creative piece. Despite the novelty of the task, some excellent work was produced, including this assignment by Ben Anderson, in which a Catholic priest describes his new parish to his brother:

> The regular parishioners were mainly miners or small business owners with their families. Normal folk really, if not a bit quirky (they all are around here,

[18] No author given. 'A White Heiress Elopes with a Negro'. *Valley Spirit*, January 19 1859, reprinted from *The Detroit Star*. <http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/news/vs1859/pa.fr.vs.1859.01.19.xml#01> [accessed 23/08/19], 1.

[19] No author given. "Miss Judson Goes to Indiana and Gets a Divorce". Valley Spirit, March 2 1859, reprinted from The Detroit Star. <http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/news/vs1859/pa.fr.vs.1859.03.02.xml#01> [accessed 23/08/19], 1.

> I think it's something about this fresh air). But this one fella in the town, he was an *Indian*. The locals, they'd shoot him looks. Some would call him "redskin". You know, like father used to when he'd tell us about them. Well I never said anything to him really. I'd see him at the local saloon when I went for a drink or two. He'd buy his drinks, and slowly drink them through the night and I never took much notice as he never caused too much trouble. At that time, I still didn't trust him though, if I'm honest. Well one day, this Indian comes up to me. Silently hands me a book, and walks away.

The book given to the priest is Henry Schoolcraft's *The Myth of Hiawatha, and Other Oral Legends, Mythologic and Allegoric, of the North American Indians*. The legends were collected and translated by Henry Schoolcraft during the 19th century, although it is likely that the origins of the legends were considerably earlier. Upon reading them, the priest finds connections between the features of the legends and his own religious tradition:

> This *Great Spirit* is described just like our God is in this sentence. Think to Bible lessons, brother. Genesis 1:1, right at the beginning, where it is said: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth". So this story, which to you I'm sure you thought to be alien, is not so different from what we know so well.

The priest goes on to uncover further links, such as those between coming of age rituals and confirmation. While he acknowledges the differences between the two traditions, his search for commonality follows in the comparative path taken by *The Golden Bough* (1890), or the Perennial Philosophy's acknowledgement of a transcendent spiritual reality that lies behind different cultural and religious manifestations.[20] I was careful not to be too specific about how the course texts were to be used in the assignment, and was impressed by the varied approaches that students used to achieve this. An assignment by Shannon Deeley that responded to *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) only mentions this text once, as a book read by Bessie, the black nurse of Jane, a white girl. As a child, Jane had formed a friendship with a young black boy who eventually has to start work on the farm:

> I went to visit Jonathan from time-to-time, but he was often embarrassed of my visits. The first time Jonathan got lashed on the farm I went to visit him but he turned me away at the door, saying that he "didn't want me to see him like this" and I remember feeling numb and alone. Bessie was getting old;

[20] Jeremy Naydler. *The Perennial Philosophy and the Recovery of a Theophanic View of Nature*. (London: Temenos, 2018), 5.

> Mummy and Daddy were growing impatient with me; and Jonathan was becoming hardened by the work and was rejecting my attempts at friendship.

As she grows up, Jane rejects the suitors brought to her by her father, and gradually realizes that she has fallen in love with Jonathan. The story ends with Jane resolving to find Jonathan and run away with him. Although Douglass' narrative is only mentioned once, it resonates in the assignment through shared elements such as inter-racial childhood connections, illicit reading lessons, the atmosphere of 19th century domestic life, and the harsh conditions experienced by slaves on plantations. By weaving these elements into a different set of events and characters, the assignment offers something new but related, forming part of the rhizome that spreads outwards from Douglass' original. This first assignment was complemented by the more traditional essay that students wrote later in the semester. In addition to introducing letters, articles, and diaries, the rhizome of texts that we studied was broadened to include cowboy poetry and songs, and Native American life writing, poetry, and oral legends. This did not come at the expense of more canonical texts, as we still studied works by Nathanial Hawthorne, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Henry David Thoreau, Kate Chopin etc. The first creative assignment helped prepare students for the second critical assignment, deepening their understanding of 19th century literature by entering into an imaginative engagement with the texts and the period in which they were created.

As can be seen from the two courses discussed in this chapter, a rhizomatic approach can be applied to different subjects and be employed in different ways. An example of a model that takes a different approach that could also be considered rhizomatic is Trent Hergenrader's course on Steampunk Rochester, where students engage in collaborative world-building in order to create a steampunk version of Rochester. This is achieved by combining creative writing with role-playing, local history, online mapping, and working together with students and educators from other areas such as computer games design and visual culture. [21] Students' wiki entries about people, places, and things are combined with vignettes from the perspectives of different characters in order to construct a rhizome where each student's work forms a node in a wider network. Reflecting on what he learnt from putting together and running the course, Hergenrader notes that courses such as his can be difficult to organise, messy,

[21] Trent Hergenrader. "Steampunk Rochester: An Interdisciplinary, Location-Based, Collaborative World Building Project" in Clark, Michael Dean, Trent Hergenrader, and Joseph Rein, eds. Creative Writing Innovations: Breaking Boundaries in the Classroom. (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 133.

challenging to assess, but nonetheless "absolutely worth doing".[22] Drawing on a wider rhizome of texts for the Dymock and 19th century American courses, and visiting a network of other locations meant that the approach I took was also challenging to organise, although this was outweighed by the enjoyment and engagement involved. The links made with organisations such as the Friends of the Dymock Poets and the university archives mean that it will be easier to organise the course in the future. The experience of teaching the 19th century American course offered some valuable lessons for incorporating creative elements into literature courses. One thing to consider is to make the instructions and assessment criteria as clear as possible so that students who may not have encountered this kind of assignment know what is expected of them and how their work will be assessed. Extending the rhizome of texts to encompass 19th century American letters and articles was also helpful in this respect, as it gave students models to work from, and gave them a familiarity with the writing styles and issues of the period. Students described the courses as engaging, stimulating, and enjoyable, with the rhizomatic approach making the subjects exciting to write about.

One of the key aspects of the approach discussed here is its relationality. This is evident in the focus on the connections between texts, places, writers, and readers, as opposed to viewing individual elements in isolation. The approach also encourages the development of the relationship between student and rhizome. Visiting places associated with the texts offers opportunities to strengthen this relationship through personal experience, and engaging with a wider variety of related texts has the potential to deepen relationships through engaging with different perspectives on a subject. A deeper understanding of the subject can also be developed through the relationships formed with other students, and educators. Taking part in class discussions on areas such as literary value and reputation, or an improvised reading in the Dymock countryside, adds to the kinds of shared experiences that help build a community of truth, where students contribute and learn from each other. Palmer draws on Barbour's view that nature is both relational and interdependent, with community being the essential form of reality.[23] Palmer suggests that our capacity to know reality is helped rather than hindered by being enmeshed in this web of interdependency.[24] In the context of the courses discussed in this chapter, by becoming immersed in the subject, students actually become part of the rhizome. This is enhanced when a student uses their understanding of the rhizome to add their own

[22] Ibid.
[23] Parker J. Palmer. *The Courage to Teach*, 97.
[24] Ibid, 99.

creative or critical contribution, enabling new art and knowledge to emerge from the relationship. Deleuze and Guattari's description of the orchid and the wasp provides an illustration of how relationality and community help facilitate this process. The orchid deterritorialises itself by taking on certain characteristics of the female wasp, creating an 'image' that attracts the male wasp to reterritorialize onto, pollinating the orchid in the process. [25] Together, orchid and wasp become a rhizome and, in the same way that the relationship between student and subject can lead to a new piece of writing, something new is created.

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Ben Anderson, Shannon Deeley, Monica Dunkley, Beka Moran, and Karl Rutherford for giving me permission to quote from their assignments.

[25] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 9.

CHAPTER FOUR

UNRESOLVED DUALITIES: CULTURAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF FLIGHTLESS BIRDS IN CONTEMPORARY POETRY

ROSEMARIE CORLETT

Abstract

The poems "I'll Invent an Emu", "Ladies Kindly Remove your Hats" and "St Kilda" are three examples of how I creatively respond to flightless birds as subjects in my poetic practice. Against the backdrop of a cultural understanding of flightless birds analogous to the conceptual framework that characterises sexism, speciesism and ableism, the poetry aims to respond to, address and challenge accretional or longstanding cultural concepts in the portrayal of flightless birds. The writing, immediate and playful, moves towards precision obliquely, showing the ecofeminist frameworks it alludes to in a prismatic way. The work situates the reader as a participant in the poems' energy–shifting voices, perspectives, tenses and discourses to destabilise the obvious, the polemical, the prescriptive, and to re-absorb the reader's attention from point to point. The poetry invokes a number of competing and disparate discourses, using scientific, taxonomic, zoological descriptions to estrange and enrich its representations. A wit of dissonance and incongruity is another way in which the poetry resists settling into cliché or stasis. Deeply interested in animal and human physicality, the poems have sometimes an erotic charge, and they always begin from a standpoint that resists presumptions of power, hierarchy, or condescension.

Keywords: description, personal, representation, imagination, gender

I - I'll Invent an Emu

From a mythological perspective, flightless birds occupy a unique and peculiarly loaded status in popular consciousness, as humans attempt to explain, justify, or transcend their grounded nature. Anticipated through the lens of their avian relatives, flightless birds are often understood within a framework of inadequacy. Aristotle puzzles over the ostrich's useless feathers and its being unable to soar aloft.[1] The Maori imagine that the kiwi, once able to fly, sacrificed its spectacular colourful plumage to save the dying forest, where the tui, the pukeko and the cuckoo refused[2], thus legitimising the kiwi's flightlessness as the consequence of self-sacrifice. Australian aboriginal mythology takes the flightless emu and places it in the sky, spotting a constellation of opaque clouds of dust and naming it "the emu in the sky". Here the flightless protagonist of the aboriginal dreamtime story is stencilled onto the stars, 'transforming meaning into form'[3] through astronomical interpretation. Initially inspired by this aboriginal dreamtime story, the poem "I'll Invent an Emu" was written as an introduction to the emu and a reflection on the bird's relationship with humans.

I'll Invent an Emu

I'll spread out an ostrich, then shrink its frame.
Until it's tall as a man, comely as a girl,
and beefy as an emperor penguin.
I'll humiliate its bones then dress its feet

with bustard or burnt quail slippers.
I'll tend to a cassowarie's tryptich claws,
and slip the bird four working bellies.
I'll call its song a straight blues drum beat,

un-render bush medicine and the oil from lamps,
cut open soft capsules to set its cushy fat in motion,
uncurl a ball of string to substitute its tendons.
The steak knives will assemble into the shape of its skeleton,

[1] Aristotle, *History of Animals.* Translated by Richard Cresswell (London: George Bell and Sons, 1883). https://archive.org/details/aristotleshistor00arisiala [accessed 10th June 2017]
[2] Rachel Warren Chad and Marianne Taylor, *Birds: Myth, Lore and Legend* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).
[3] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies.* Translated by Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987), 131.

while its meat slowly grows the same pH value as beef.
The blue moon will come. All the way down to earth
without rolling or adjusting or getting any bigger.
And an egg will land as softly as a cat

inside my emu's nest. I'll tuck in my arms and claim
I was the first to be flightless, then steep a 747
in imbricate petals. I'll roll a beluga in soot and scales.

I'll ask that we look up to the dark cloud lanes
when the Milky Way is clear and dying, and I'll demand
we see an emu reaching out for itself in a trail of running dust.

When humans describe the emu in zoological terms, its physical appearance is often understood to the extent to which it is similar, or dissimilar to other birds. For example, its toes are described as having the same tridactyl arrangement as bustards, quails and cassowaries.[4] It is described as weighing slightly more on average than the emperor penguin, and being slightly shorter than an ostrich.[5] Emus are described as unique among birds in that their gastrocnemius muscles in the back of the lower legs have four "muscle bellies" (the sum of all muscle fibres in any given muscle) instead of the usual three[6]. In "I'll Invent an Emu", these relative physical descriptions are considered in isolation, then collected as guidelines, as the poet attempts to build an emu from these disparate pieces of knowledge:

I'll spread out an ostrich, then shrink its frame.
Until it's tall as a man, comely as a girl,
and beefy as an emperor penguin.
I'll humiliate its bones then dress its feet

with bustard or burnt quail slippers.
I'll tend to a cassowarie's tryptich claws,
and slip the bird four working bellies.

[4] Lisa Nupen, "The Dazzling Diversity of Avian Feet" *African Birdlife*. September/October (2016): pp.34-38, accessed October 29th 2019, http://www.fitzpatrick.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/275/Publications/PDF_Archive/Africa_Birdlife/Author_Index/AB04%286%2934-38.pdf.
[5] John Gould. *Handbook to the Birds of Australia*. (Smithsonian Libraries, 1865) accessed October 29th 2019 https://archive.org/details/handbooktobirdso02gou/page/200.
[6] Phil Glatz et al. *The Welfare of Farmed Ratites*. (London: Springer, 2011).

While the emu's physicality is understood in relation to other birds, the emu's behaviour and physiology is sometimes framed in relation to human points of reference. For example, its grunting call is described as similar to a drum beat[7], hence the line in the poem: "I'll call its song a straight blues drum beat". The bird's strength is also understood in relation to its impact in a human setting: it is said that the bird's legs are powerful enough to tear down metal fences. Emu meat is described as a 'low-fat product' and is called a red meat because it has a similar pH value to beef, also mentioned in the poem. The incongruous imagery of drum beats, beef Ph etc has its origin in zoological descriptions. These images work to estrange the writing via another known mode of discourse, that isn't poetry, but sits amongst it. The poetry becomes a defamiliarising discussion with the factual. For example, the emu's tridactyl claws become "tryptich" claws in the poem – subverting the scientific term and deploying a term from art.

The poem begins to consider and attempts to imagine what creature or object might appear if working backwards from human descriptions of the bird and emu-derived products. A third discourse emerges as the Aboriginal myth of the emu egg being throw into the sky and becoming the sun[8], is "reversed" in the poem, with the moon coming down from the sky and landing in an emu nest:

> The blue moon will come. All the way down to earth
> without rolling or adjusting or getting any bigger.
> And an egg will land as softly as a cat
>
> inside my emu's nest.

In the third stanza, I bring together the tools and supplements made from the emu's body:

> [I'll] un-render bush medicine and the oil from lamps,
> cut open soft capsules to set its cushy fat in motion,
> uncurl a ball of string to substitute its tendons.
> The steak knives will assemble into the shape of its skeleton,

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[7] Deepa G. Menon et al, "The Behavior of Domestic Emus: A Means to Improve Their Management and Welfare—Major Behaviors and Activity Time Budgets of Adult Emus" *Journal of Animals*, Article ID 938327 (2014). Accessed October 30th 2019, http://dx.doi.org/10.1155/2014/938327.

[8] Judy Skatsoon, "Aboriginal Astronomers See Emu in The Sky" *ABC Science,* 16th August 2005*,* accessed 31st October 2019, http://www.abc.net.au/science/news/stories/s1437646.htm.

while its meat slowly grows the same ph value as beef.

Aboriginal use of bones for making tools is documented across Australia. In some parts of Australia, a sharpened section of emu bone was fashioned into a peg or spur mounted on the end of the spear-thrower[9]. Emu bones were also made into ritual daggers, known popularly as "pointing bones"[10]. In the poem, these tools are referred to as the steak knives to highlight the emu's chemical link with beef. Emu tendons were used to make string, fat used for aboriginal healing purposes[11] and now rendered to produce oil for cosmetics, dietary supplements and therapeutic products, also mentioned in the poem.

In terms of process, "I'll Invent an Emu" began in second person conditional tense: "You'd Invent an Emu". The conditional clause was made up of all the physical, behavioural and cultural references to the bird, with the intentionally flawed hypothesis that if one was to collect all these elements, one would, ostensibly, "invent an emu". And as such, this human invention is borne on the page as a collection of items and comparisons that bear no apparent resemblance to the bird. Changing the poem to first person came about because even in the efforts to highlight and challenge the human and knowledge-centred ways the animal is described, a new emu representation was inevitably being garnered through the act of writing the poem – indeed, *I* would invent an emu. I also changed the tense to future tense to show the poet looking forwards throughout the poem: the act of finishing the poem (and "inventing" the emu) is not something that could happen (as the conditional tense would imply) but something that will happen, the moment the poem is complete. I am looking into the future with each line of the poem, and there is a satirical and fatalistic tone that runs throughout the piece – hopelessly and inevitably moving towards another representation of the bird. The poet becomes more and more desperate and the emu becomes more and more effaced as this representation evolves. In fact, when the poet cannot conjure the bird from its distinct parts, she attempts to fashion the bird from aeroplanes. Given that the bird is considered oversized and stout-bodied, the poet chooses the first jumbo jet

[9] South Australian Government Printer, *The Prehistoric Arts, Manufactures, Works, Weapons, etc., of the Aborigines of Australia* (Adelaide: 1897).
[10] Adolphous Elkin, *Aboriginal Men of High Degree* (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1977).
[11] Phillip Clarke, "A Review of Early Indigenous Artefacts Incorporating Bird Materials in the Lower Murray River region, South Australia" *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia*, 142:1, (2018): 27-48.

(the Boeing 747) and the first wide-body plane designed for oversized cargo (the Airbus Beluga):

> [I'll] steep a 747 in imbricate petals.
> I'll roll a beluga in soot and scales.

In the poem, the petals are used to attempt to mimic the bird's overlapping feathers; the soot is used to mimic the emu's colour (and as a soft call-back to the burnt quail slippers in the second stanza). The scales can be interpreted as overlapping fish scales to mimic feathers. But a scale can also be a rudimentary leaf or feather, or each of the numerous microscopic structures covering the wings of butterflies and moths. The word also alludes to the relative size or extent of something, as though amidst the efforts to measure and grade the emu, the poet is somehow trying to cover the bird with, and/or (dis)cover the bird's true "scale".

Unable to make the bird from its distinct parts, or craft it from aeroplanes and various props, the poet becomes desperate and decides to use her own body–trying to disguise herself as the emu and appropriate its flightlessness. She can't describe or encompass it, so moves on to trying to appropriate and become it:

> I'll tuck in my arms and claim
> I was the first to be flightless

Then finally, unable to animate the bird through language, the poet makes a demand on the reader. She references the "emu in the sky" a constellation representing the bird used in aboriginal culture[12], and tells the reader to see it:

> I'll ask
>
> that we look up to the dark cloud lanes
> when the Milky Way is clear and dying, and I'll demand
> we see an emu reaching out for itself in a trail of running dust.

In turning in imperative mode to the reader, instead of encompassing the emu, the poet creates (albeit coercively) a small moment of human community–we are looking together. Finally, the emu in the sky, an idea of

[12] Robert Fuller et al, "The Emu Sky Knowledge of the Kamilaroi and Euahlayi People" *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage* 17, Issue 2, (2014) Preprint.

the emu stencilled onto the stars, is now reaching out for itself, and the reader and poet watch the representation reaching out for its own essence.

II – Ladies Kindly Remove Your Hats

Given that flightless birds occupy a distinctive yet nuanced space in popular consciousness, my work explores how our conception of these creatures can be further imagined, diversified and celebrated through poetry. If the flight bird is the messenger, the omen, the interpreter of the will of the Gods, my work asks which roles the flightless bird play in our imaginations and how these roles might be identified and deeply envisaged via contemporary poetry. My poetry about flightless birds aims to uncover and shine a light, for both the poet and the reader, on new perspectives around the unconsidered and the marginal. Within a discovery-based method, it asks: what new ways of thinking can the evocation of these creatures offer to twenty-first century culture? The poetry seeks to make new spaces in the conversation by reflecting upon the many ways birds can be flightless. In this sense, it addresses the idea of flightlessness in playful and curious ways, looking not only at birds that have lost the ability to fly through evolution, but reflecting on caged birds, stuffed birds, paper birds and mythical avifauna. Interested in the geopolitical and symbolic weight of the ostrich feather as a heavily traded and appropriated object, the poem "Ladies Kindly Remove Your Hats" is a poetic response to the trend for luxuriously adorned women's hats, which caused great annoyance to 1910s motion picture spectators. Adorned with "everything from exotic bird plumes, (…) to miniature barnyard animals, women's early twentieth-century hat fashions butted heads with the sheer logistics of film screen visibility"[13]. In 1909, one film journalist complained:

> "The eternal feminine hat is always a source of much irritation to mere man (…) In this regard the average woman is quite a savage person. It is a matter of pure indifference to her as to how much inconvenience the person sitting behind her may be put by the wearing of her hat. She bought it to wear; to be looked at; to be admired and envied on all and any occasion, and if she has to remove it, 'hell hath no fury like a woman' deprived of her pet hat"[14]

[13] Maggie Hennefeld, Women's Hats and Silent Film Spectatorship: Between Ostrich Plume and Moving Image. *Film History 28*. 3. (2016): 25.
[14] "Handling the Visitor" *Moving Picture World.* October 1909. 482. Accessed 17th February 2019. https://archive.org/details/moviwor04chal/page/n487

The poem takes a second look at the ostrich feather and the women who wore it, confronting the patriarchal ideology that provoked a "profound ambivalence towards the female spectator"[15], and creating a poem that places women at the centre, plays with ideas of excess, vanity and voyeurism, and ultimately enjoys an intentionally decadent showcasing of female rage.

Ladies Kindly Remove Your Hats

Don't put me on a pedestal
because I will let you

down. I wear a plumed hat
to a silent film – the violence

of a feather draws close
to my body. Dense and bound,

amphitheatred with oranges,
the headdress blocks

the movie screen—
balanced erect with imitation

deadness; I'm no use
to fauxweathers.

It's probably that I'm trying

to provoke a murder. *My* murder
flicks across soft millinery, bang
against the auditorium. Bedeck me

good in meteor crêpe—
she bought it to be looked at—
my bad
heart, yes

arranges like a story. Or bordering collected
stories, asleep on each other's shoulders:
one a waxed clementine,

[15] Maggie Hennefeld, Women's Hats and Silent Film Spectatorship: Between Ostrich Plume and Moving Image. *Film History 28*. 3. (2016): 26.

next the lacquered feather of a flightless bird.
I'll have it all at once
and one at a time. And the insides.

As theatre owners sought to legitimize film culture at the time, the social conditions were created that would engender the desire to for patrons, particularly women, to project status. This manifested through the wearing of increasingly ornate and visually obstructive hats–the symbol of middle-class decency. The poem begins:

Don't put me on a pedestal
because I will let you

down. I wear a plumed hat
to a silent film – the violence

of a feather draws close
to my body.

As such the "pedestal" in the poem is the female body itself that holds the hat, but it also alludes to the gendered public sphere of the time–the aesthetic problem of the hat was fuelled by the social desire to appear more "elevated" than the average frequenter of the seedy nickelodeon theatres. "The violence of the feather draws close to the body"–indeed, the hats were carcasses: testaments of status, excess and geopolitical imperialism. Importantly, the sought after feathers were exotic conquests, procured from animals in North Africa or the South Pacific. In *The Arcades Project,* cultural critic Walter Benjamin says "There is hardly another article of dress that can give expression to such divergent erotic tendencies, and that has so much latitude to disguise them (…) the shades of erotic meaning in a woman's hat are virtually incalculable"[16] The poem continues:

Dense and bound,

amphitheatred with oranges,
the headdress blocks

the movie screen—
balanced erect with imitation

[16] Walter Benjamin, "Fashion" *The Arcades Project*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 80.

deadness; I'm no use
to fauxweathers.

The "dense and bound" headdress is portrayed as a place that is suggestive, erotic and unknowable, while the amphitheatre analogy affirms the hat as a site of performance and entertainment. The hat is "balanced erect with imitation deadness" – it is as much teetering and unreliable as it is lifeless and phoney, a contradiction further crystallised with the invented portmanteau "fauxweathers".

In the closing stanzas of the poem, I respond to two statements made by men about women's hats, one remark that resides within a movie itself. I firstly respond to Charles Haughton's character Sir Wilfred in the 1950s film-noir *Witness for the Prosecution*. In the film, he remarks "I am constantly surprised that women's hats do not provoke more murders."[17] I confirm in the poem that it is, in fact "my murder" that I am trying to provoke. Thus, within the poem, a third display is added into the fray of moving and static images: the silent film running onscreen, the plumed hat obstructing it, and finally my own murder, providing a further garish interruption: flicking "across soft millinery" and banging "against the auditorium". As such, in the context of the movie theatre, the "lacquered feather of a flightless bird" mentioned in the poem, is not only a feature in the network of personal and shared encounters that traversed public and private borders at the time, but also the object that most crudely exhibits and encapsulates the pageantry and violence that permeated and characterised these collective and individual experiences. Finally, I quote the journalist from *Moving Picture World,* who mentioned that I "bought [the hat] to wear; to be looked at; to be admired and envied on all and any occasion"[18] specifying that I not only bought the hat to be looked at, but that I intended to consume every element of it, from the feathers to the waxed clementines. As such the sheer animal greed for experience and consumption is completely antithetical to the demure conventional femininity signified by the hat. I explain that:

I'll have it all at once
and one at a time. And the insides.

[17] *Witness for the Prosecution*, directed by Billy Wilder (1958; Los Angeles: Edward Small Productions, 2018.), DVD.
[18] "Handling the Visitor" *Moving Picture World.* October 1909. 482. Accessed 17th February 2019. https://archive.org/details/moviwor04chal/page/n487

III – St Kilda

The last Great Auk to be seen on British Isles was stoned to death by three sailors from the Scottish Island of St Kilda in 1840. The flightless bird was abducted on the nearby sea stack of Stac-an-armin. Its legs were tied together and it was taken back to the men's ship for three days. The sailors grew increasingly superstitious, and on the fourth day, during a terrible storm, they believed the bird to be "a maelstrom conjuring witch" and stoned it to death.[19]The bird was described in the nineteenth century as so tame that it would walk up a plank or a sail that stretched from the ship to the shore[20]. Had the sailors been interested in the bird's valuable meat and feathers, they would have boiled it once captured. Indeed, it was not the bird's nature or value but rather the sailors' superstitions that led them to fear and kill the creature. Just under a century later, the St Kildan people were removed from their island home, and their community disappeared. The poem 'St Kilda' tells the story of the end of the St Kildan community, and the Great Auk's extinction. It situates the bird's fate as prefiguring that of the islanders, considering the scramble for the great auk's resources and the bird's eventual eradication as a bleak foreshadowing of the treatment that the St Kildans would later be subject to themselves. The poem considers the cultural beliefs about human and nonhuman communities that could legitimise domination and engender violence.

St Kilda

1.

I only see her picture, but it feels like looking at a photo
of myself as a child–her carriage so much more sober
than the other extinct birds.

Where the red rail arches its talons, and the little bittern
pouts its chest, the Great Auk holds no internalised mood.

[19] Samantha Galasso, "When the Last of the Great Auks Died, It Was by the Crush of a Fisherman's Boot" *Smithsonian.com*, 10th July, 2014, Accessed July 3rd, 2019, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/with-crush-fisherman-boot-the-last-great-auks-died-180951982/#vg3dgsdkGYH2b2mL.99

[20] Symington Grieve, *The Great Auk or Garefowl* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), accessed 7th February 2018, https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/great-auk-or-garefowl/3CC16685E4263C92292EC8055C9453E1.

No anchor to herself. It's like she's waiting

to ask permission. She is black on one side
and white on the other, like a sea stack at sunrise.
I love her dark hair against the white dress.

She models herself: a sexual bride with instant history,
a moving story, if stories become moving
the moment their contents are released.

Extinction–the hand that just now held a gold coin,
opens up and vanishes.

2.

I love to imagine the family prayers
spoken softly for the last time–
the delicious black image
of a bible left open in each house.

We boarded a steamer for the archipelago
of St Kilda, to obtain a postmark
before the island was evacuated.
Later that year, its inhabitants

were gathered and removed.
It's a scene that begs

the same terrific yearning
for a storm so severe
it leaves you deaf for a week.
For the island bay's conflicting winds
to see a dozen sheep blown over

a cliff. For the timbre
of the seabirds' screamings–
the one remaining unmuted frequency,
to unlock the weather and foreshadow
its decisiveness. To be free
yet to freely espouse

an island fit for prison,
fit for good impartial justice–the factor
dressed in a long tweed trench-coat
beside the heap of harvested gannets.

3.

Before humans vanished from St Kilda,
there was a golden hour
in which their paucity was rehearsed,
with seabirds enacting the dry run
of what it means to be flatteringly scarce.

Each year, the Great Auk
slipped ashore to lay one egg
on bare rock. And as the value
of her diminishing body increased,

her single egg came to function
like a postmark: a collector's record
timestamped in the dark–inkless,
mineral and freeform.

It wasn't difficult for the three islanders
who found her asleep.
These were the same alpine cragsmen
who hammered bolts,
fastened ropes around their chests,
scaled barefoot to better grip the familiar,
soaking descents. The same men
who years later would pay in felt and oil
for their own evacuation.

4.

They caught her asleep and for three days
the Great Auk hovered, like witchcraft–
pre-liminal and blaringly realised
with her legs tied together.

As a storm reached its bleakest
they beat her for an hour. Broke her
short sleeves with two large stones,
then placed her behind the bothy–
each shaking with the extraordinary heat
of touching a family member
as she goes. Later, dead gannets

were slipped through the gaps in their belts,
and their bodies snowed occasional feathers
on their way back up the rock face.

By evening, they had cleared a fulmar roost
so dense it blanched the rocks,
gently dismantling
the seabirds' concrete poem
to open up a path along the ledge.

The shaping of St Kildan culture speaks to a negotiation between real and imagined versions of the place and its inhabitants. The fact that the word "evacuation" was used to describe the St Kildan's forced departure from their home in 1930 (regardless of the fact that many inhabitants did not support the move), addresses the notion that cultural rhetoric is not shaped equally by all its participants. More than two dozen files, once property of the department of agriculture, were released in 1968. Steel notes that it is only from the collection of letters, minutes, and memoranda that we can begin to understand the "true tragedy of the evacuation–not only the human distress involved, but the parsimony and bureaucratic behaviour of the civil servants involved"[21]. In 1930, St Kildans were presented as being rescued from their unsanitary, uncivilised lives. Today, it is generally considered that the community was torn from their rural idyll. Indeed, the changing impression of the St Kildan's migration speaks to that fact that "rhetorical analysis suggests that the meaning of tropes is closely related to their wider social context. They are therefore not fixed entities but develop and change historically"[22]. The literary trope of extinction has changed as awareness of climate crisis has risen. For example, the Great Auk's flightless neighbour the Dodo, largely forgotten for the hundred years following its extinction, has moved from a clumsy and incidental curiosity in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*[23] and the joke in the flippant idiom "dead as a dodo", to the hero of a cautionary tale–a popular (and lucrative) icon of human-induced extinction.

In the second stanza of the poem, three monochrome images blend: one human, one nonhuman and one geological:

She is black on one side
and white on the other, like a sea stack at sunrise.
I love her dark hair against the white dress.

[21] Tom Steel, *The Life and Death of St. Kilda: The moving story of a vanished island community* (London: Harper Collins, 1994), 10.
[22] Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge. 2012) 8.
[23] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (London: Penguin, 1998 [1865]).

The Great Auk becomes a bride as well as the sea stack on which the bird was killed. The sea stack becomes a monument to the great auk, echoing its shape and colour scheme at sunrise. The bird's image, wedded to the St Kildan rocks, is presented as embedded in the landscape.

By the mid-sixteenth century, the great auk's nesting colonies along the European side of the Atlantic were nearly all eliminated by humans killing this bird for its down, and the Great Auk had disappeared from Funk Island (its biggest nesting colony) by 1800. The increased scarcity of the Great Auk in the mid nineteenth century engendered a fury on collectors' parts to buy their eggs and skins, and the vanishing St Kildan life would be subject to the same scramble for resources. From the 1870s onwards, cargo steamers with passenger cabins offered trips around the Hebrides and St Kilda began to feature in the itinerary. From 1877 the SS *Dunara Castle* offered annual summer cruises to St Kilda. The excursion included observing the cragsmen at work, purchasing eggs, cloth and stockings and meeting the inhabitants.[24] If the appeal of the people there, their hand made products and old fashioned practices appeal to a pastoral ideal, the untamed and brutal landscape presented a potent idea of wilderness. Many on the mainland had their interest aroused by the publicity given to the St Kilda evacuation in 1930; vessels passing by were in the habit of whistle-blowing or canon-firing to startle the gannets and allow passengers to enjoy an ornithological show. The poem refers to the many day trips mainlanders took there in order to obtain a postmark from the island before the community disappeared:

> We boarded a steamer for the archipelago
> of St Kilda, to obtain a postmark
> before the island was evacuated.
> Later that year, its inhabitants
>
> were gathered and removed.

The poem then places the human and nonhuman communities in parallel, suggesting that the seabird's diminishing eggs operated as a similar commodified souvenir to the St Kildan postmark:

> Each year, the Great Auk
> slipped ashore to lay one egg
> on bare rock. And as the value

[24] Michael Robson, *St Kilda: Church, Visitors and 'Natives'* (Isle of Lewis: The islands Book Trust, 2005)

of her diminishing body increased,

her single egg came to function
like a postmark: a collector's record
timestamped in the dark–inkless,
mineral and freeform.

The positive dialectic that demands the inferior category be absorbed into the superior one may give us insight and a deeper understanding of the process of marginalisation, and in particular how that process can lead to violence, with the killing of the Great Auk. Indeed, what we differentiate will appear divergent just as long as the structure of our consciousness obliges it to strive for unity. As my poetry explores the cultural portrayal of an animal framed as one part of a duality, it invites the poet to consider other communities that represent only the negative, differentiated in relation to the superior category. It also invites the poet to express herself in these terms. I use my poetry as a way of speaking forth elements of gendered experience which resist prose's closure–the figure of the flightless bird acts as a muted other looking for a place of articulation, and in its chronicles, especially its disasters of extinction, mockery, mutilation and death, I make poetry which addresses both the plight and place of these birds, and also the gains and losses of my own personal interactions.

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Chapter Five

Textual Corporeality and the Insect Self

Michelle Braunstein

Abstract

This chapter responds to creative writing through the zone of the immanent. By problematising the liberal humanist tendency to interpret texts transcendentally, it maps a new materialist, Critical Animal Studies response to creative writing—intra-acting with texts as open flows and corporeal becomings. Exemplifying this with excerpts from the creative component of a practice-based doctoral thesis, a novella called *Order of Our Lady Cicada*, as well as Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and Octavia E. Butler's *Bloodchild*, this chapter also foregrounds how insects, transformers themselves, are "animals" which are as far removed from the "human", as what the humanist construction of mind has been able to imagine. In provoking corporeal responses to creative writing, mainly through the realm of the sonic, this chapter attempts to de-transcendentalise the text. This call for a response to creative writing that is metamorphic, insectoid and beyond representation is part of an urgent, bigger project of decolonising everything.

Keywords: Immanence, embodiment, metamorphoses, Anthropocene, creative writing.

Introduction

Like lemmings, the thought-forms that constitute and defend the master narrative, liberal humanism, are marching off a cliff. The Anthropocene and

the sixth extinction event, inclusive of "insectogeddon",[1] are only several of many clear signals that liberal humanism is terminal. It may be premature to envision the dance that cyborgs and other hybrid/non-human intelligences will perform on the mass grave of humanism. However, the post-human is already here, and the non-human has always been here. And if we, *Anthropos* (assuming for a moment that the constructed category has a modicum of purchase) are to survive the sting in the tail of liberal humanism—probable ecological collapse and possible nuclear warfare—we may require ways of knowing and being that we do not yet know we are capable of. This paper contends such, through the lens of the non-representational: responding to creative writing as corporeal encounters and becomings, as part of a larger post-colonial project of undoing, unmaking and unknowing.

The acceleration of liberal humanism's inevitable levelling necessitates a metamorphosis which needed to happen yesterday. Problematisation of representation as a way of knowing, in this chapter, is research-as-monkey-wrench to the failing system and a rubbing of salt into the wound. After troubling representation, comes a call to (non)representational thinking and writing: an immanent response to the text, or rather, to what is beyond it, while swatting away the liberal construction of mind, which can only respond transcendently. The aim is not to romanticise feelings or the body in place of the mind, or to suggest that somehow the transcendent can ever be fully immanetised. Rather, the intention is to trace the way representation itself is always aware of the "other", or shadow of the corporeal/the body beyond the text.

This proposition necessitates dropping what Barad describes as "the common-sense view of representationalism…a deep mistrust of matter, holding it off at a distance, figuring it as passive, immutable, and mute, in need of the mark of an external force like culture or history to complete it."[2] As such, the response here to creative (un)writing, strives not to think about it transcendently, but to *thing* about it immanently. As is spoken in common vernacular these days, "it's a thing". Indeed, creative writing is a thing, or

[1] Caspar A. Hallmann, Martin Sorg, Eelke Jongejans, Henk Siepel, Nick Hofland, Heinz Schwan,Werner Stenmans, Andreas Müller, Hubert Sumser, Thomas Hörren, Dave Goulson, Hans de Kroon, "More than 75 percent decline over 27 years in total flying insect biomass in protected areas." *PLoS ONE* vol. 12, no.10, 2017, https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0185809

[2] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 132.

more precisely, an assemblage of "vibrant things".[3] This will be explored further below, but not before also positioning creative writing as a minority praxis for decolonising the liberal humanist authoring of animal representations, as undoing the binary human/animal is another aspect of the monkey-wrench to humanism cast, and is key to actualising the metaphor.

For liberal humanism, this discussion is not an attempt to create more theoretical territory or to propose a replacement ideology. Rather the intervention is a non-teleological provocation to undoing and unmaking; a continual work of decolonising totalised systems and lineages of meaning, because of their ongoing abuses. As Timothy Morton observes, "the lineage that brought us slavery and racism is also the lineage that brought us the anthropocentric boundary between human and non-human".[4] Given the Anthropocene, climate change and the rates of mass extinction we are facing, it is literally vital to problematise this binary and the lineage which made it. This is the same lineage which binarised body and mind, and it is equally vital to trouble that border because the result of the liberal humanist construction of mind being disembodied is that it can only think in ways which binarise and transcendentalise. It is as if, and also actual, that the mind has forgotten that it is intrinsically imbricated with the body, and also, merely a tool to receive and transmit information. The constructed liberal humanist mind seemed at some point to decide that it was a solitary entity capable of creating knowledge; of living in a transcendent reality comprising entirely of metaphor and of representation. As such, the mind that thinks it is disembodied, with its voraciousness for creating territory, cannot actually unthink its way out of the present trouble we are in, on earth at this time. The disembodied mind can only *think* about the necessity of un-thinking and deterritorialising, but it cannot go it alone.

As an intervention, I am inspired to respond to creative writing in ways which are immanent and thus beyond the jurisdiction, remit and capability of this very limited liberal humanist construction of mind. I call this "thinking and writing the animal self", and I do so from a critical animal studies perspective, with awareness that the categories of human and animal are of course founded upon false borders. In dissolution of this border, Tom Cohen and Claire Colebrook argue, "there never is and never was the human".[5] Kari Weil also observes, "animal studies may have emerged only

[3] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*. (North Carolina, Duke UP, 2010), xvi

[4] Timothy Morton, "They Are Here," in *The Nonhuman Turn*, ed. Richard Grusin. (Minnesota: U of Minnesota P, 2015),167-175.

[5] Tom Cohen, Claire Colebrook and Hillis J Miller *Twilight of the Idols* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2016), 12.

in time for its existence to be outdated. Much like the "women" in women's studies, the "animal" in animal studies must be placed under erasure".[6] Equally, the "human" in humanities is outdated, and is facing *actual* erasure given our dependence upon the very life support systems we are subjecting to ecocide. As such, Critical Animal Studies is critical in two ways—its exposure of the humanities' insufficiency to deal with the present system failure is both rigorous and necessary.

Another proponent of the enquiry, Thomas Nagel, wonders what it is like to be a bat, in his provocation to the binary, mind/body. He selects bats over "wasps or flounders because if one travels too far down the phylogenetic tree, people gradually shed their faith that there is experience there at all".[7] However, travelling further down the phylogenetic tree to insects is crucial because they give solid bioindications for levels of pollution and the health of ecosystems. Further, Braidotti's encounter with insects as "powerful indicators of the de-centring of anthropocentrism… point(ing) to post-human sensibilities",[8] has powerfully fed the current of post-humanism that the present work flows within. I also look to insects *because* of Nagel's reason for not choosing them. It feels like a "no-brainer" to choose the Other of the Others, yet it is outside of the scope of the present paper to address with any rigour or depth what scientists are now saying about insects and consciousness—that they have it,[9] not to mention that valorising consciousness is problematic. As part of Braidotti's troubling of the Big C, she highlights its directional quality, signalling a kind of perversion inherent in its passage: "far from being an act of vertical transcendence, rather [it] functions as a push downwards, almost like an act of inner invasion…. as such, consciousness is rapacious, predatory, unthankful and self-obsessed". [10] This colonising tactic of consciousness further incites a revolt against its main mechanism: meaning-making. Likewise, in dealing with art broadly, Sontag's attack on interpretation is incandescent and rousing. She argues,

> today is such a time, when the project of interpretation is largely reactionary, stifling. Like the fumes of the automobile and of heavy industry which

[6] Kari Weil, *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (New York: Columbia UP, 2012), 19.
[7] Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 83, no. 4, 1974. pp. 435-450
[8] Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses,* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 105.
[9] Barron, Andrew B and Klein, Colin. "What insects can tell us about the origins of consciousness," PNAS May 3, 2016 113 (18) 4900-4908; doi.org.10.1073/pnas.1520084113
[10] Braidotti, Rosi. *Metamorphoses,* 122.

> befoul the urban atmosphere, the effusion of interpretations of art today poisons our sensibilities. In a culture whose already classical dilemma is the hypertrophy of the intellect at the expense of energy and sensual capability, interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art.[11]

Although suspicion towards the western construction of mind—its self-obsession and sense of entitlement—first fomented during my undergraduate studies in post-structuralism, co-occurring with some psychedelic encounters in the rave scene, it was not until I began journeying more resolutely with entheogenic plants in ceremonial contexts in my thirties, that an active rebellion against the disembodied mind took root. This in turn, sparked a search party for the locus of that which was/is in excess of meaning. Speculating at first that the likely "places" for such experiences might be as deep into the viscera that psychotherapy could plumb, or as far into the cosmic abyss that plant work could propel, in hindsight, the seeking of novel edges through various ritual and psychodramatic practices in western liberal atomised settings, has a colonial shadow. And also, that these missions in and out, down and up, round and around, would return me only ever to one place, over and over again, ad infinitum. Each frontier heralded another intermezzo; another crossroads of mind and body. There simply was no "pure" locus of one without the other. Liminality, a site for the binding of immanent and transcendent, not only ideationally, but experientially, has been no purgatory in a punitive sense. Rather it has granted me respite from the violence of a humanist mind's delusion that it is, or can be, free and untethered. In turn, this quiet liberation from liberation has altered my encounter with the text. So, while I cannot claim that I, or anyone, will ever be entirely free of consciousness's rapacious cluttering, with more frequent access to the quieter loci of the intertwined body and mind, I encounter creative writing differently to before.

Some methods for bringing creative writing practice "down" from the transcendent into a more embodied metamorphic practice, may be taboo through the liberal humanist lens of how knowledge ought to be uncovered or constructed. These methods' capacity to attune one to that which is beyond conceptual reasoning or understanding threatens the Cartesian and Kantian foundations upon which the liberal humanities is built. Accordingly, the (non) representable—pleasure, desire, emotion and sensation—is as Colebrook suggests, transformative. Immersion in these, energises the question, in the tradition of Deleuze, of what art does, rather than what it

[11] Sontag, Susan. *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, (London: Picador, 2013), 13.

means.[12] As such, I further the project of Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari and Braidotti, and execute practice-based research that focuses on metamorphosis not metaphor, exploring the sense of energy and desire which exceeds meaning in certain works of literature. To do so, works themselves are treated as corporeal becomings. Gumbrecht apprehends why anyone might want to do something like this, and seems to celebrate, "rather than have(ing) to think, always and endlessly, what else there could be, we sometimes seem to connect with a layer in our existence that simply wants the things of the world close to our skin".[13] This is the case for the protagonist, Magda, in *Order of Our Lady Cicada.*[14]

> Against my will, I soon tumbled into sleep and resurfaced in the gloom. A shadow flickered at first, then sped along the wall. I wondered what being it belonged to, but when it leaped into the centre of the room, I realised it *was* a being. Folding in on itself, it morphed into a grey cat, which jumped to my bedside. Padding from my feet to my head, it settled beside me and curled around my neck. I relaxed for a moment in its affection, before sensing that it was very gradually constricting. Tighter and tighter it curled, pythonic now. I tried to raise my hands to my neck, to pull it off me, but they were pinned to my sides. I was on the brink of panicking when the cat vaporised into smaller fragments, which rolled off my body and bounced to the floor like little balls of mercury. I watched as one by one, these silver spheres recapitulated, forming one giant seed pod with multiple nodes. Each node sprouted spectres which shot from their centres. Tall and gangly, soon these beings were many, creeping along the walls and the floor. Fascinating though it was to watch, I knew from experience that the show was not going to be free. Sure enough, the spectres leaped onto me and pinned me to my bed. At the same time, sticky glue emanated from their forms, entering my nostrils and throat. I tried to scream but all that came out was a suppressed moan. The spectres' glue had jammed me up.
>
> *Where is Michiko?* I inwardly inquired, as though a site manager or director overseeing my waking nightmare might come to the rescue. I even wondered if there was a benevolent tour guide hiding somewhere amongst the husks, slime, shadows and shells, who could advise me. But neither supervisor nor guide spoke up. All I could hear instead were grinding metals, distant groaning and the unintelligible whispers of thousands of voices.

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[12] Colebrook, Claire. *Understanding Deleuze*, (Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2002), 177.

[13] Gumbrecht, Hans U. *Production of Presence: what meaning cannot convey,* (USA: Stanford UP, 2004), 106

[14] Braunstein, Michelle, "Mapping (Non)representations of Metamorphoses, Tricksters and Insects Through Seven Stories," (PhD diss., Murdoch University, 2020).

> Then, from the gloom, a new performance emerged. Around seven or eight tall beings began writhing in a dance macabre, while from their midst, the insect creature came clattering across the floor towards me. I tried as hard as I could to muster the will to wake myself up. But alas, I remained bound by the sticky spectres and their foul glue. The insect launched at my torso and attached itself to my solar plexus with its claws. There it stuck its proboscis into my stomach took a drink from the well of my life-force.
>
> Pumped up now on stolen energy, it raised me in the air like a puppet and twirled me around the room, all the while whispering into my ear nonsensical phrases mashed up with static interference. Then it lay me back down and attached its proboscis to my mouth and drank again. The shrinking boundaries of my awareness merged with the night and a proper sleep this time, which lasted until the morning.[15]

*

While she experiences much beauty in her waking encounters in Japan, Magda, in the *Order of Our Lady Cicada*, is also haunted and hunted at the borders of her perception by the insect creature through much of the novella. It assaults her in the hypnagogic zone between her waking and sleeping, one which may be considered a metaphoric realm, yet it is also actual. It is an object full of objects, not even a separate realm, but an overlapping one, and rather an over-functioning one in Magda's case.

Eventually however, through her ritual work, she becomes the insect creature. There is a double charge here to this intervention to representation: firstly, in the content of the story as filtered through the intellect, and secondly in the transfer of metamorphic energy through the writing and reading of it.

To demonstrate further the imbrication of Magda's becoming and the corporeality of the writing, she is here interacting with her housemates, Bron and Tomas.

> Tomas, however, was quiet. He just watched.
>
> 'You *look* different!' I realised Bron was staring at me.
>
> 'Do I?' I circled the fuzz on the apple of my cheek, to see if I could feel the difference with the fingertips of my left hand. But all I could really feel was that his eyes were now following my fingers. Beneath his heavy brow, twice, three times travelled his eyes, following the circular pattern my fingers traced on my face. It was as if I was numb, as if his watching had rendered me so.
>
> *Stop!* I screamed inwardly, not sure if I was more annoyed about being observed so closely or at how easily hypnotised he was. It was this inner

[15]Ibid., page 57

scream that might have been enough to break the pattern. Or perhaps it shattered because of what I began to feel inside of my hand. An itching and tingling. Rubbing, twisting, bubbling. I stretched my palm out, first wriggling my fingers, then shaking my entire hand wildly, as though beginning a strange dance. But no dance alone could ever be stranger than my hand becoming a claw, with two pincers lined with a brown fuzz.

I tapped at my sternum with my new appendage and the percussive sound that the sharp edges of my claw made against my shell caused me to lie back against the park bench and breathe a sigh of delight. My irritation with Bron had given way to waves of pleasure throughout my body. Every part of me was feeling every other part of me. Tears streamed from my eyes. *This is what I'm here to do,* I was about to explain when I noticed the subtle jutting of Bron's elbow into Tomas's side.

'She does look different, doesn't she?' Tomas murmured, pushing a lock of hair from his face.

'It's the eyes, but it's something else too.'

'It's scary actually.'

'Yeah… alien! What did they do to her over there?'

They continued discussing me, as though I wasn't there, while I rubbed my feet together, in total bliss. It barely registered when Tomas spluttered,

'She looks like an insect!!'

He'd seen me.

'Yes, so true! But it keeps coming and going. It's like she's morphing.' Bron shook his head and frowned. I burst out laughing.

'Oh my god, she's laughing. Is it funny? S'pose it is. You went away and became like a…like…an insect!' Tomas's eyes flashed silver in the moonlight and a frisson juddered through his body, insectoid too — it was clear to me.

'Well, now that you're talking *to* me, not *about* me, I *will* say, it's cool that you can see, because….' I faltered. How could I tell them I actually *was* an insect? That I had always been. Would they be too frightened to remain my friends? My thoughts had begun to spiral again, mind-hooks pulling flesh from my heart and leaving gaping pockets. Or were holes in my heart drawing in ambient doubts? It was all too close, too enmeshed for me to be able to post-rationalise. Then words came, and I almost believed them.

'Hey. Don't worry. It's all good!' I hazarded another smile, only half-way this time, which started me wondering how my mouth appeared to them. Were they seeing the straw which extended from my jaw, rather than my usual pinkish brown lips? I licked them as they suddenly felt dry.

'It is the eyes…but, ahhh….' Bron stopped and I knew what was coming next.

'Yeah, that and the long thing coming out of your mouth!' Tomas almost shouted. Beads of sweat had formed above his lip, which glistened in the park lamplight. I watched him wipe them away with his knuckles.

> 'Oh yes, that,' I half-whispered, bringing my claw to my face and running it along the outline of the proboscis, which was both fuzzy and firm at once.
>
> 'The straw thing; it's fading in and out. What are you doing to reality? What the fuck, Magda?' Tomas's voice broke in his fright.
>
> 'Yeah. What the *actual* fuck?' Bron somehow seemed both angry and amused at the same time.
>
> 'Well, so, I haven't told you yet about the last bit of my trip away.'
>
> The boys exchanged sideward glances.
>
> 'Oh, *I* know!' Bron's eyebrows leaped up conspiratorially, before I had even had a chance to say anything. '*You* are one of those sorta white, sorta not, shit-cunts who plunders the foreign Other to find their higher self! Only, *your* higher self is an insect! That's fuckin' funny, Magda! You're a pisser.' He slapped his thigh and guffawed and ever so slightly, he twitched.

Apart from marking the above as a crossroads encounter of human and post-human beings, with fidelity to this project, no further meaning will be extrapolated here, instead the corporeal addressed. The characters here are pushing, jutting, spluttering, juddering. Magda's hand/claw is itching, tingling, rubbing, twisting, bubbling. A lock of hair, an elbow, saliva, bodies without organs, dead and alive, fluids fly. Twitching, licking, flapping, slapping, stroking — of interest here is the sonic territory of the language; its inseparability from the shapes the mouth in the mind makes and how the words whisper in the body when they are internally intoned. These are (non)representational traces and tributaries, thing-ing words, through which the energy of the text flows.

Such lines of flight can be found in other insectoid texts also. Kafka, of course, is an obvious exemplar, especially because his concrete type of writing defies easy interpretation. Non-representational traces can be located in his *Metamorphosis*[16], particularly through its soundscape as a site which has been richly encoded with embodied, noisy data—sonic material which escapes signification. Cox et al. make an important intervention to theorising sound, calling for a materialist account—"the auditory real"[17]. This provokes the possibility of the fertile interplay of responding to sound in creative writing, as its own category of becomings.

Smith deals with the dynamics of oppression through sound in several Kafka texts, weaving her reflections on these together with those on the

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[16] Franz Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*. trans. Malcolm Pasley (London: Penguin Books, 1992),

[17] Cox, Christoph. "Beyond Representation and Signification: Toward a Sonic Materialism" *Journal of Visual Culture* August 9, 2011 Research Article https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412911402880

politics of music in texts by Deleuze and Guattari[18]. She is particularly interested in clashes between chaotic and ordered sounds. This clash zone is interesting less for its *representation* of the dynamics of oppression (although it is still an important discussion) and more for the metamorphic *energy* in creative writing that dwells there, and how this deals with the dynamics of oppression. Whereas Smith looks mainly to representation of gender and the use of sound as signalling permeability of the border between the empowered and the oppressed[19], the present exploration has been more concerned with how sound interacts with both the non-representational desire that drives the insect as an agent of transformation and as a "multi-layered dynamic subject."[20]

Smith's work does also cross into the realm of that which is beyond representation, particularly where she points to Deleuze and Guattari's argument that,

> what interests Kafka is a pure and intense sonorous material that is always connected to *its own abolition* — a deterritorialised musical sound, a cry that escapes signification, composition, song, words — a sonority that ruptures in order to break away from a chain that is still all too signifying. In sound, intensity alone matters, and such sound is generally monotone and always non-signifying.[21]

A single mosquito in a bedroom at night, its buzz rupturing silence, drilling irrational fear and profound irritation into the heart of the prone human, in its own minority moment, could monotonically and momentarily fracture a humanist construction of control. Also, sound which escapes signification speaks here to the focus on metamorphoses as distinct from metaphor. Indeed, Kafka emphasises the transformation of Gregor's voice, and its very concrete shift: "'Did you hear how Gregor was speaking just then?' 'That sounded like an animal,' said the chief clerk, in a tone that was strikingly subdued compared to his mother's shrieking."[22] This is a moment of post-human irony too, as Gregor's noise is charged with being animal, when his mother is actually the one who is shrieking. And further:

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[18] Smith, Jessica S. "Sonic territories: Deleuze and the politics of sound in Kafka and Duras" (PhD diss., State University of New York, 2005).
[19] Ibid., v.
[20] Braidotti, *Metamorphoses,* 118.
[21] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Toward A Minor Literature*.Trans. Dana Polan (USA: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 6.
[22] Kafka, Metamorphosis, 85.

> Gregor gave a start when he heard his own voice as of old, but mixed in with it, as if from below, was an irrepressible, painful squeaking; and this only left the sound of the words clear for a moment, before distorting them so much that one could not tell if one had heard them properly.[23]

This passage imparts a delicious liquid trickery because of how the situation sits at the threshold, the mixing in "from below." The words are "clear for a moment" before they are ruptured to the point of irretrievable slippage and confusion. Gregor's embodied desire, that which is beyond representation, remains at the threshold of human and animal, both representational and non-representational. This desire is expressed through the form and intensity of his expression rather than in the content itself. Here, too, Gregor makes a break from the Oedipal/patriarchal prism of his family and workplace, his voice an embodied agent of that scission. Kafka's writing in general does the same. Its concrete corporeality in and of itself is more a potent expression of dissent than an overt, ideational quarrel with what was/is wrong with the world: what has come to be known as the "Kafkaesque" conditions of industrial capitalism. Sokel reminds us, too, that Kafka considered writing as prayer[24], which, considering his disaffection for his father's brand of materialism[25] suggests that his process was indeed a kind of spiritual as well as political, rebellion.

Unpacking the excerpt above further, the qualification, "but mixed in with it, as if from below, was an irrepressible, painful squeaking"[26] is very abstruse and a contradiction in terms, as "below" at first implies that it has a low register, but "squeaking" implies a higher one. This could leave the reader, with the sense that Kafka is not at all referring to pitch when he writes "below" and wondering if instead he is invoking something more dimensional, a kind of hell. Here is a possible reference to the plane of immanence, which of course is paradoxical, as he has engaged metaphoric language to depict it. It could be that Gregor has fallen, like Lucifer, to his liberation from the oppression of transcendent narratives about Oedipal family and capitalist labour. The change in Gregor's voice is a sonic subversion, alerting his family and his chief that something about him is no longer what it was.

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[23] Ibid., 78.
[24] Walter H. Sokel, *The Myth of Power and the Self: Essays on Franz Kafka* 36 (USA: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 36.
[25] Patrick, Bridgewater, *Kafka's Novels: An Interpretation*, (Netherlands: Rodopi, 2003), 2.
[26] Kafka, *Metamorphosis*, 85.

In another part of the story, he tries his best to reassure his family that there is nothing to be concerned about: "'I'm just coming' said Gregor by way of reply in both directions, doing his best to make his voice sound as normal as possible."[27] Indeed, he does his best, which again points to the earnestness of his embodied rebellion, to how his left hand does not know what his right hand is doing, and to how truly schizophrenic and beyond representation the insect, Gregor, is. His slippage into becoming animal/becoming immanent is one which inspires a corporeal response to this dawning of the post-humanist age—an age wherein omnipotent transcendence is dead.

Like in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, there is also non-signification in the sonic landscape of Octavia Butler's *Bloodchild.* Of the insectoid alien being T'Gatoi, the protagonist Gan remarks, "she made a lot of little clicking sounds when she walked on bare floor, each limb clicking in succession as it touched down. Waves of little clicks."[28] Ordinarily, the use of the word "click" used thrice in two sentences might point to a dearth of imaginal arrows in an author's quiver. However, Butler's clever play with the word becomes a synaesthetic, (non)representational trick as the letters on the page sound in the ears. Smith's articulation on the use of sound in *Metamorphosis*[29] to indicate the fluidity of the boundary between the empowered and the oppressed, inspires me to explore the ways in which this threshold zone that Smith refers to, between oppressed and oppressor, is a possible site for body/mind binding in *Bloodchild* too. Hence the sound of T'Gatoi's clicks here in that liminal zone, particularly in their manifestation as waves, are another reference to liquidity, plunging the reader into a body of water, as line of flight, blurring the distinction between thoughts, feelings and the words (waves) on the page. The elegance of the waves of clicks juxtaposed with the grotesqueness of the giant insectoid life form, T'Gatoi, who is making them, is difficult and paradoxical in perpetuity, its rub palpable against one's very flesh.

At the risk of being teleological, to conclude, it is miraculous that creative writing can be a virtual/actual nexus, beyond the disembodied mind's capacity to only think transcendentally and representationally. Through responding to creative writing immanently, metamorphoses are possible—the works themselves as corporeal becomings, experienced through their writing and reading, less their meaning. Indeed, there is an energy that is transmissible through embodied responses to creative writing, especially with those texts involving insects, which unsettle widely held

[27] Ibid., 79.
[28] Octavia Butler, *Bloodchild,* 23.
[29] Smith, Jessica "Sonic territories", v.

notions of humanism, change and representation. This is vital, given the Anthropocene's throwing into sharp relief that liberal humanism is a failed system. Creative writing can respond in a way that is beyond just thinking about this, holding the potential as a practice for metamorphoses and post-human becomings. Terminal humanist thought-forms may well try to argue or even agree, but it is immaterial either way.

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CHAPTER SIX

INVENTING STORY ORIGINS: BACKSTORY, GET BACK!

GEOFFREY GATES

Abstract

This chapter explores the question of where the essence of a creative writer's story comes from. What is the story behind the story? It draws on the author's own experience in writing three novels, including work submitted as part of postgraduate study. Two key themes emerge in this discussion: inspiration and intertextuality. While inspiration has become less fashionable in the post-Romantic world of literary studies, it remains a useful concept for creative writers. This chapter contributes to the demystification of the term through the metafictional strategy of foregrounding the researcher as writer. Intertextuality connects to literary theory through the idea of deconstruction, but also—in practical terms—examples of influence and connection to literature and art in the author's own writing are included. While this chapter is primarily a form of critical narrative, reference to relevant research is included in drawing the argument to conclusion. Responding to creative writing is a highly personal, cognitive and experiential process that occurs over time as ideas 'ferment' in the mind and emerge on the page.

Keywords: creative writing; inspiration; creativity; intertextuality; metafiction; imagination

Every story begins somewhere, but to pin down the origin of that story to a single moment is the work of fiction. In retelling the story of the story, in other words, we invent a scene as any writer worth their salt would. By way of illustration, I begin this critical narrative here in the Domain in Sydney, near to the New South Wales State Library where I do much of my writing.

I sit on a bench under the shade of a Common Olive; I glance across the park to the row of Morton Bay Figs that make more than one appearance in my latest novel. Beyond the trees lies the Art Gallery where *The Phantom Surrealist*[1] opens, with its fictional illusion of a story starting. A pair of pecking Ibis approach—strange, exotic birds—while Sydneysiders amble between gallery and library, twin poles to the story of my story. Other tales of origins will follow. An argument needs more than one example, and a Borgesian labyrinth more than one room. A homeless man approaches and asks for some money to buy something to eat; I give him $5—not exactly tax-deductible but at the right threshold. He takes an expensive-looking wallet out of a pocket bulging with debris. It feels like the beginning of a story.

*

The Phantom Surrealist began its life in the State Library, on the corner of Macquarie Street and 1 Shakespeare Place. As an institution, the library opened in 1826 in the days of the penal colony, though its present façade is more Federation than Emancipation. On the afternoon of 16 March 2016—so Microsoft Word reliably tells me—the dull yellow eye of the storyteller opened. Among ancient books and young students, I wrote the first scene set in the art gallery (across the Domain) where narrator Christopher Giffen spies a painting that will change his life. I had decided to write in the first person, something I felt was more American than Australian—more Paul Auster than Peter Carey. To balance this, I conceived of the character as a 'likeable larrikin'—an Australian expression referring to a charming maverick. He would be clever, but out of place in Academia—a contemporary autodidact. Also, a bit of a rake: a PhD student with a chip on his shoulder the size of the Sydney Basin, and a wandering eye. He would be fun to write, and fun to read. I do not think I have ever written as freely as I did on that sultry March afternoon, as if the muse had me in its grip; or Christopher Giffen sat beside me, dictating every word.

Told this way, the only backstory we need for this story is a library scene with an inspired writer, writing. In fact, we can tell other stories of invention and origin for *The Phantom Surrealist.* Eight months earlier, I sat on a bed in my French in-law's house, typing an application for a doctoral program. As part of the application process, I needed to pen the synopsis of a book not yet in existence. As l look back at this document—16 September 2015—I can see the essential elements of the now completed novel: the storyteller;

[1] Geoffrey Gates, *The Phantom Surrealist,* 2019 (unpublished novel).

the painter he is researching; the Barcelona setting and Sydney origins. I cannot tell you precisely where this story came from, though I assume it was formulating while I drove a motorhome around the Scottish highlands in the weeks beforehand with my little troop of creatives (i.e. children), conscious only of steering an oversized vehicle down narrow roads in low visibility. Maybe the fog was key: the imaginative freedom that comes from being lost in a foreign countryside. Perhaps the brain simply repeats itself, like an author's stutter. My two previous novels both included a flawed protagonist, an element of mystery, and the search for the truth for those of us not born on a clear and righteous path.

A third origin story is as mysterious as the second is prosaic. We were back in Australia, low cloud replaced by full sun. It was December 2015 and I was on my way to Canberra to see an exhibition of the Australian colonial painter, Tom Roberts. A quotation by Robert Hughes from his mammoth book *Barcelona* had inspired my proposed studies and indeed forms part of my thesis title: an anecdote about the chance meeting of the Catalan painter Ramón Casas and Tom Roberts as the latter's introduction to impressionism ("Province Spoke Instinctively to Province …"[2]). In Canberra a hundred and thirty-three years later, I followed the trail of the painter's youthful adventures in Granada, his middle age in Sydney, his dying days in London. Having read Hughes, I was well prepared for national myth painted in impressionistic style. What utterly surprised me, however, were the series of modernist, Australian war paintings in another gallery room. Among them was a small painting, *Returning Volunteer* 1938[3] by the little-known Melbourne-born Surrealist, James Montgomery Cant. The painting drew me in a powerful way: here was the horror of war: crutch; leg lost; mouth wide open to suggest an endless scream. In the centre of the painting, the volunteer raises his fist in the salute of the Spanish Republic, though I initially missed this signifier, tricked by the desert landscape into seeing an Australian veteran of the First World War.

I had invented an Australian surrealist who knew Spain in the 1930s only to find such an artist had not only existed, but had left a haunting painting as evidence. This must be a feeling familiar to researchers everywhere. Never mind the story sketch, or the purposeful grant application as "origin". Sometimes a topic chooses you. The resulting epiphanies and feelings of Surrealist Chance begin rather than end here, but I am reluctant to give the game away entirely. To write about an artist requires much reading—hours of historical mining for the occasional gold nugget. Chance must always

[2] Robert Hughes, *Barcelona* (London: The Harvill Press, 1992), 493.
[3] James Cant, Returning Volunteer, 1938 (oil on canvas)
https://artsearch.nga.gov.au/detail.cfm?irn=90973

play its part. When the *possible* of a work of fiction meets the *actual* of historical research the feeling is one of sliding doors, a fateful meeting, the rush of unexpected synthesis.

One further example from *The Phantom Surrealist* should suffice. At the outset, I decided that the last scenes of my novel would take place in Greece. Whether this was a case of wish-fulfilment or wanderlust, it made the doctorate proposal. Several years later, now well into the research, I read about a group of Australian expatriate artists who lived on the Greek island of Hydra in the 1960s. I planned a visit. There I found a house that once belonged to George Johnston—author of *My Brother Jack*—a novel I had heard about but never read. Prior to visiting Greece, I completed a section of my novel where my fictitious artist meets the Australian artist, Russell Drysdale in Hill End, New South Wales. I made the comparison of Hill End and Hydra as two isolated arts communities surrounded by bush and water respectively. After my visit to Greece, I tracked down a copy of George Johnson's follow-up to *My Brother Jack* written in Sydney in the late 1960s: *Clean Straw for Nothing*. An obscure title, no longer in print. The dedication reads "to Russell Drysdale and his wife, Bonny."[4] Sitting in my study, I recalled Roland Barthes essay "The Death of the Author" and grew queasy—the part of the text where he talks about a text as a "multidimensional space" where "a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash". The original tale I wished to write was (to use Barthes' phrase) "a ready-formed dictionary". Sometimes a topic chooses you. Sometimes you find that you are merely a copyist. "Life never does more than imitate the book," writes Barthes, "and the book itself is only a tissue of signs, an imitation that is lost, infinitely deferred"[5].

*

The idea of art as imitation is a central concept in my earlier work of fiction, *The Copyart Murders*, a metafictional crime story published in 2015. In the story, a young Australian writer travels to the south of France where he meets an Icelander, and through her, a controversial French artist, soon to be deceased. Blake Knox—named before Amanda Knox became famous as an accused murderer (eventually acquitted)—is soon under arrest on

[4] George Johnston, *My Brother Jack* (Sydney and London: Collins, 1964) and *Clean Straw for Nothing* (Sydney and London: Collins, 1969).
[5] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text*, ed. & trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Fontana, 1979), 146-147.

suspicion of a crime he has merely invented[6]. The murder and the events leading to it occur in the manner by which Umberto Eco describes his relationship with Borges in "Borges and My Anxiety of Influence"—similarities that reflect zeitgeist, rather than plagiarism[7]. Not a copy, then, but something magical in the air that draws two writers to labyrinths, and a writer and a murderer to plot the death of an artist in near-identical fashion.

Where did this story begin I wonder? Was it a response to the world around me? Was the backstory to *The Copyart Murders* textual or personal, literary or factual?

One afternoon when *The Copyart Murders* was not yet born, I sat in my upstairs study, waiting for inspiration. At the time, we lived in a townhouse in walking distance from the university I had circled back to after nine years overseas. Ivy had begun to grow on the concrete buildings, but otherwise the university looked like a series of misplaced bunkers, far from Aix-en-Provence, where my imagination roamed. Apart from the sound of an idling bus and the squawk of fat cockatoos flying straight towards my open window, the house was quiet. In front of me were various newspaper clippings—stories of artists and writers I had cut out of newspapers and magazines. In different ways, they were all concerned death. One article described the writer Andrei Makine's arrival in Paris from Siberia and his residency, for a time, in the Père Lachaise cemetery[8]. *The Copyart Murders* opens with my protagonist asleep on a gravestone in response to a drunken self-dare (I admit the influence). Another article described an artist's life in the country—a man with a thick, grey chest hair spilling out of an open shirt in the golden light of late-afternoon.[9] The artist's name was Robert Hannaford, and he found death fascinating. There—in this tissue of signs—was my murdered artist. I wrote quickly—four short chapters to hand to my supervisor by a deadline I had been avoiding while the story formed in the recesses of my mind.

Well into the first draft of *The Copyart Murders*, an article I found described the trial of a Polish author Kristian Bala, suspected of murder due to the similarity of his book to a real-life murder-case. I still have the article, with the promising headline "Art imitated death, so author sentenced to 25

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[6] Geoffrey Gates, *The Copyart Murders* (Carindale: Glass House Books, an imprint of Interactive Publications, 2015).

[7] Umberto Eco, "Borges and My Anxiety of Influence," *On Literature,* trans. Martin McLaughlin (London: Vintage, 2006), 118-135.

[8] Philip Delves Broughton, "Minimum fuss, maximum liberty," *Sydney Morning Herald* May 29-30 2004.

[9] Roy Eccleston, "Robert Hannaford," *The Weekend Australian*, February 17-18 2007.

years' jail".[10] Underneath it (at the time), I wrote "*Found this article, quite similar (in a way) to Blake's predicament. Of course, plots can be quite coincidental. Take the fact that I am 30,000 words into my novel when I read this."* This tone I now found rather understated. In this real-life example, there are strong similarities to the synopsis I typed at least as early as January 2007 (Barthes: "Life never does more than imitate the book"). To quote a cliché—also a film title that year—it is all "Stranger than Fiction". The newspaper story, and my own plot, imagined in one country and played out in another, and in the wrong order for an easy explanation.

There are other origins—less metaphysical, more metafictional.

Stories that explore the idea of writers trapped in their invented tales have long since held me in their grasp. One was entitled "First Draft Julia", published in 2003. The first lines: "Julia is a girl from a novel—one she is trying to write. And so, one always gets mixed up in her fictional subplots"[11]. Another story is about an author who gets the idea of making a subterranean library from a Scottish writer he is reading ("The Renaissance Builders")[12]. In "The Bohemian Convict Diaries", a young writer plagiarises a university professor's historical research about a common criminal ancestor, only to find that his uncle has a penchant for fiction. ("If Dr Parker had made up the *Bohemian Convict Diaries* [Louis's] own work wasn't fiction based on history at all, but *fiction based on fiction based on history based on fiction*!)[13]. There are other stories from this time also involving writer-protagonists circling into ruins. This may be another means by which the brain repeats itself (if repeated ideas are motifs, repeated tics are a writer's *style*).

The origins of a story lie in memory, in the imagination, in the events of the times (the zeitgeist) but also by what we read—the stuff of literature itself. In economic terms, writing represents an inverse relationship of consumption and production. Rather than primarily producing something which others consume (i.e. a story), the writer consumes a multitude of stories in order to produce one—something that might explain the poor financial return for the intellectual labour involved. For writers who are teachers or academics, a variation on this transaction may be at work: the professor consumes a multitude of stories in order to understand how they

[10] Matthew Day, "Art imitated death, so author sentenced to 25 years' jail," *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 7-9 2007.
[11] Geoffrey Gates "First Draft Julia," *Gangan* 27 (2003) https://www.gangan.at/27/geoffrey-gates/
[12] Geoffrey Gates "The Renaissance Builders," *Southerly* 68, no.2 (2008):125-129.
[13] Geoffrey Gates "Bohemian Convict Diaries," LINQ 32, no.2 (2005): 89.

work. A by-product of this labour is the university novel (or teaching is a by-product of studied-creativity). In 2006, I was teaching a course of crime fiction, a genre I had little experience of beyond a childhood fascination with the usual suspects. After a summer spent catching up on theory and on reading examples of the subgenres (cosy, hardboiled, thriller, noir—and its Nordic variations), I was ready to teach, and getting closer to write. The prescribed reading list included P.D. James' *The Skull beneath the Skin,* a novel that combines popular crime with literary allusions to John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi.* I read Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep* like a familiar revelation, and Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* stretched the genre into the crimes of civil war.

Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy* gave me something to sing about—particularly "City of Glass", where a writer named Quinn takes on the role of detective after a caller addresses him as "Paul Auster", the name of the fictional writer's fictional detective. A book like that is irresistible to certain reader-writers, and I am one of them. Auster's deceptive matter-of-factness, for example, always stops me in my tracks ("He had continued to write because it was the only thing he felt he could do. Mystery novels seemed like a reasonable solution"[14]). I also read and enjoyed the metafictional premise and entertaining use of footnotes in Auster's 2004 novel *Oracle Night*, where the writer and narrator Sidney Orr decides to write the life of a character from Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*—that classic hardboiled novel. Here crime gets a postmodern treatment in the hands of a masterful writer whose playfulness with genre creates a very readable text that deals with complexity and randomness, loneliness and fragility. I was soon back to the metafiction menu of Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino and Umberto Eco—all of whom play with notions of literary mystery and in one form or another, write the metafictional detective story. This, I suspect, is why interviews with writers inevitably turn into discussions of their bookshelves. Stories begetting stories.

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Considering I wrote the first third of *The Copyart Murders* as an MA Dissertation, it would be entirely appropriate to ponder a more scholarly response to the question of origins and backstory. Hazel Smith and Roger Dean argue that creative practice, "is one of the most exciting and revolutionary developments to occur in the university within the last two

[14] Paul Auster, The New York Trilogy (London: Faber and Faber) 4.

decades"[15]—partly, I think, because it opens up inquiry into the very nature of creative thinking. The authors make the distinction between research-led practice and practice-led research: the former suggests that "scholarly research can lead to creative work", while the latter refers to "both the work of art as a form of research and to the creation of research insights which might then be documented, theorised and generalised". Given my thesis required only a short introduction and not a full exegesis, I now wonder what sort of research questions might I have been implicitly asking, and how these questions form part of the backstory of the work itself?

Research-led practice: I might have asked such questions as; what is a metafictional detective story and to what purpose does it serve? What ethical questions might a writer face if he or she locates a story in a foreign clime? (My story is set in France). To what extent do crime and travel genres blend as a hybrid form in the exotic crime story? How might metafictional strategies form part of a scholarly interrogation of genre and meaning in literature? Should an exegesis be a requirement in a creative PhD that includes within its fictional premise a metafictional interrogation of research and writing?

Practice-led research: I might have asked such questions as; in what ways does reading crime fiction and travel memoir influence my writing? Can one theorise a typology of influence? What forms of reflective practice and narrative inquiry might lead to research outcomes that are generalizable, as well as focused and particular? How might I avoid some of the traps of self-reflexive inquiry, especially given the potential for labyrinth-like discussions implied and embodied by a metafictional artistic output?[16]

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Such scholarly questions might lead some to try to conjure (nostalgically) a pure form of creativity where the fiction writer is divorced from the academy or commercial interests, and exists in a healthy commune, which sponsors his or her artistic output. *The Phantom Surrealist* forms part of a Doctor of Creative Arts project. I have written without contractual imperatives and the dream rather than the experience of commercial success. My academic commune has come from the sponsorship of

[15] Dean, R. T., and Hazel Smith. *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts. Research Methods for the Arts and Humanities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 1.

[16] Andrew E McNamara, "Six rules for practice-led research," *Text: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, (2012), 1-15. Rule 6: "Avoid defining PLR as more self-reflexive than other research methods."

research-grants in temporary digs, completing writing residencies in France, Barcelona, Crete, and the beautiful Blue Mountains above Sydney. All settings and geographical inspirations for *The Phantom Surrealist.*

Much earlier on, when I started writing my first novel *A Ticket for Perpetual Locomotion*[17]*,* I merely imagined a writer's life (still in my twenties, trying to see if a short story might grow into something else). I have long since lost the earliest drafts of the novel (it was in the 1990s) but I know where the essential idea came from. I would not be the first reader to experience thoughts of infinitude while reading Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. For me, one of the most striking passages in the novel concerns a character known only as the "Wise Catalonian" who—experiencing "two nostalgias"—calls on his old friends to abandon Macondo. This sentence: "… [Álvaro] bought an eternal ticket on a train that never stopped travelling" is undoubtedly the engine powering my own perpetual locomotion[18]. In the early drafts of my novel, I alluded to this passage (later replaced by reference to a fictitious author). However, as with the other examples given so far, the backstory to this story is more complicated than the influence of one writer alone, albeit one of genius. A haunting sentence, at least for a beginner writer, will only take you so far. You have to find your own Macondo in the mysteries of childhood, and the tales of elders around you then.

My mother's father stood out the most as a man of exotic qualities. He had lost both his legs to gangrene (in the golden age of cigarettes) and so when I visited him as a boy, he was often sitting up in his bed, his smooth stumps not quite covered by his shorts. After lunch, he smoked a pipe and drank Scotch whisky. Ian "Mick" Mackenzie was very proud of his Scottish heritage, and often spoke about his ancestor, a Presbyterian minister who had tended to Australia's first Gaelic community in Scone, New South Wales (and through whom he hoped that a lifetime of church-avoidance be forgiven, should Christianity prove true). In my childish imagination, rather than Scotland conjuring up images of haggis, highland cows and tartan, I pictured something that I eventually recognised as Mexican—sombreros, cigars, and guitars. This deeper memory, I think, is behind certain plot aspects of my first novel, which had a Mexican author even before I had visited that country myself. For *A Ticket for Perpetual Locomotion*, then, two points of origin, years apart in memory, connected here in the central premise of my first novel—a desperate avoidance of nostalgia and

[17] Geoffrey Gates, *A Ticket for Perpetual Locomotion* (Carindale: Interactive Publications, 2005).
[18] Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (London: Pan Books, 1978) 325.

repetition: "What is a Perpetual Locomotion Ticket, you ask? It is a ticket offering unlimited access to all forms of transport, in all parts of the globe. But the holders of the ticket must undertake to travel in a forward direction only …") [19].

There is clear inspiration from *One Hundred Years of Solitude* here (even continuation—"the text as multidimensional space"). More mysterious is Marquez's lasting influence: I have spent the last few years investigating "Everything Catalan", not realising that a Colombian's Wise Catalonian had suggested Barcelona to me in these final pages of this dense, foreign book, read decades before.

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In "Recovering Inspiration in the Spaces of Creative Writing", Catherine Brace and Adeline Johns-Putra consider why a now-unfashionable, Romantic word "Inspiration"—described by one post-structuralist scholar as a "spurious and exploded theory of the sources of literary power"—continues to make sense to writers.[20] In arguing for a place for inspiration as a concept, Brace and Johns-Putra favour an approach that sees creativity as "something lively and excessive, something unpredictable and emergent, which is both a product and process of the human imagination"[21]. There is a wrestling here with *both* post-structuralist criticism (Barthes "the Death of the author" is quoted) *and* Romantic idealisation, seen in an attempt to "destabilise the myth that processes underlying creative work are somehow necessarily, always ephemeral, elusive and resistant to scholarly inquiry."[22] This is done through engagement with "non-representational theory", which itself holds certain tenants that are difficult to evaluate, such as the assertion that "our embodiment and being in the world means that we know significantly more that we can tell"[23]. The paper includes commentary on a series of interviews with writers in an attempt to look at whether a

[19] Gates*, A Ticket for Perpetual Locomotion*, 2.
[20] Timothy Clark, *The theory of inspiration: composition as a crisis of subjectivity in romantic and post-romantic writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 1. Cited in Catherine Brace and Adeline Johns-Putra "Recovering inspiration in the spaces of creative writing" *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, 35, no.3, 2010, 405.
[21] Brace and Johns-Putra, 400.
[22] Brace and Johns-Putra, 401.
[23] Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (New York: Doubleday, 1967). Cited in Brace and Johns-Putra, 403.

"rapprochement" between representational and non-representational theory might help "[recover] the place of inspiration in creative writing"[24]

Brace and Johns-Putra note the problem of "elusiveness" which occurs, "even where the writer attempts to write about the creative process". In this model, while the "first phase" reports "tangible, lived experience", the second—signalled by the concept of inspiration—"is often imagined as 'dictation by a force larger than herself or himself'"[25]. There are various means to deconstruct or otherwise rationalise this "magical" feeling or experience. Rather as I have attempted to here, Brace and Johns-Putra explore the two themes of "inspiration and intertextuality" in an interpretive analysis that "tries to accommodate 'the experiential richness and circularity of writing'"[26]. In terms of circularity, I began this chapter by retelling the story of the story, reconstructing my writing the opening chapters of *The Phantom Surrealist* in the State Library—the words "dictated" to me by the narrator of my book (the "sign" of inspiration).

Is this a form of elusiveness? A writer retells a key moment of creativity or inspiration and adopts the guise of a storyteller. Perhaps the writer sets the scene in a park, with a pecking Ibis, and an approaching homeless man asking for money. You will only have their word for it that their account is a critical reflection, and not an imagined scene based here or there in time and space, written with this or that intention in mind.

On the question of creative writing itself, Brace and Johns-Putra note in their study that some writers "were guarded about subjecting inspiration to scrutiny". On the other hand, it was possible to get writers to "talk around the concept of inspiration rather than of it"—for example, by discussing how "ideas and thoughts need to ferment", often enhanced through a notebook as a space for creative writing[27]. There may be a difference between self-scrutiny as a creative practitioner with an academic audience in mind; and a wider, more generalizable fear that it is best not to disturb the muse with too much self-analysis. This idea brings our two key themes to mind.

Inspiration: I peruse my own notebook, from September 2017. By now, I was well into the writing of the first draft of *The Phantom Surrealist*, and I was living for a month in Barcelona, working on my novel. One afternoon,

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[24] Brace and Johns-Putra, 399.
[25] Rob Pope *Creativity: Theory, History, Practice* (London: Routledge, 2005) 18. Cited in Brace and Johns-Putra, 402.
[26] Angharad Saunders, "Literary geography: reinforcing the connections" in Progress in Human Geography online first DO110.1177/0309132509343612, 2009, 9. Cited in Brace and Johns-Putra, 404.
[27] Brace and Johns-Putra, 406.

I visited a nearby town where inspiration of place is in evidence: *"…What I felt today was that this place might be an alternative interpretation of the painting that opens my novel and connects [my two main characters]."* In the voice of my narrator in the novel, this realisation has a mystical bent. Here in my notebook, it reads more like the slow fermentation of ideas. It serves both purposes, and perhaps a third—reflections for a chapter on "Responding to Creative Writing".

Intertextuality: In *Oracle Night*, Paul Auster's narrator—novelist Sydney Orr—buys a blue notebook that seems to cast a spell over its owner. Auster's uses footnotes as a narrative device to make the reader feel like they are getting the "truth" (or inspiration) behind the story they are reading. Perhaps a critical narrative—like this one—serves a similar purpose, even coming with a warning in the title: "Inventing Story Origins: Backstory, Get Back!"

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CHAPTER SEVEN

OVER A SUN-LIT ABYSS: TRANSLINGUAL WRITING IN THE GLOBAL AGE

JENNIFER QUIST

Abstract

Translingual writing happens at the intersections of translation and creative writing, where writers with facility in more than one language inscribe the imprint of one of their languages upon another within single texts. The concept emerges from both composition studies and literary studies into creative writing studies. Approaching from the perspective of literary studies and from the pairing of English and Chinese (languages with a distance between them sometimes described as an "abyss"), I introduction the perils, potential, and broader implications of translingual writing as a means of innovating and invigorating how creative writing can be done and what it can produce. Writers have successfully created contemporary translingual fiction from this disparate language pair. Considered here are Xiaolu Guo's novel *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers,* David Henry Hwang's play *Chinglish,* and short fiction from Ha Jin. These works are compared to mishandled attempts at Chinese-English translingualism in popular culture and in Ezra Pound's *Cathay*. This analysis, along with Ha Jin's argument that translingual writing be, above all, "genuine," yields suggestions that translingual writing entail intimacy and insight into languages enough to foster attention to detail, depth beyond humor, and respect beyond dazzlement.

Keywords: Creative Writing; Translation; Macaronic; Bilingual Chinese; Ha Jin; Ezra Pound

Though we may not know translingual writing by this particular name, we do indeed know it. What's more, we have benefitted from its power to move literature forward, from John Dryden's reworking of Virgil into heroic

couplets, to the Modernist poetry of T.S. Eliot, to James Joyce's experimental novels, to the contemporary standup comedy of Eddy Izzard, to an ever-expanding array of overlapping languages in our era of globalisation. Translingual writing happens at the intersections of translation and creative writing where writers with facility in more than one language deliberately inscribe, and even exaggerate, the imprint of one of their languages upon another within a single text. Though translingual writing is often done in the interest of verisimilitude—to better mimic the reality of a multilingual world and challenge the myth that the global majority is monolingual—it is also undertaken to invigorate creative writing, entering our field, in the words of Susan Bassnett, as a way for "writers to expand the parameters of their own work."[1] Writers working at the confluences of languages, writing translingually, are those Steven G. Kellman calls "the prodigies of world literature,"[2] its "shock troops,"[3] innovating and revitalizing how creative writing can be done and what it can produce. What follows is an introduction—a look at the perils and potential and broader implications—of translingual writing emerging from the meeting of English and Chinese in writers who can read and write in both of these commonly spoken, uncommonly incommensurate languages.

Inverted Babel: Translingual Writing, the Politics of World Literature, and Good Art

Translingual writing inevitably involves the complicated, troubled global politics of world literature. According to Gisèle Sapiro, "far from favouring diversity, globalization has reinforced the domination of English," [4] Analysing data from the UNESCO Index Translationum, Sapiro and Johan Heilbron found that each year, more new books appear in English, and more are translated out of English than any other language,[5] over-representing

[1] Susan Bassnett, "Translation," in The Creative Writing Handbook, ed. Steven Earnshaw (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) 373.
[2] Steven G. Kellman, Switching Languages (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2003) ix.
[3] Steven G. Kellman, The Translingual Imagination (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2000) 31.
[4] Gisèle Sapiro, "Globalization and Cultural Diversity in the Book Market" in World Literature in Theory, ed. David Damrosch (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2014) 215.
[5] Johan Heilbron and Gisèle Sapiro, "Translation: Economic and Sociological Perspectives," in The Palgrave Handbook of Economics and Language, ed. V. Ginsburgh, et al. (London: Palgrave, 2016) 378, 382.

anglophone books and authors worldwide. Referencing Itamar Even-Zohar's literary polysystem theory, Sapiro argues that this over-representation reinforces the "hyper-central"[6] position of English in world literature. In the words of ex-patriate Chinese writer Ha Jin, "I have been asked why I wrote in English. I often reply, 'For survival.'"[7] To hazard some sweeping biblical rhetoric, in world literature, we are currently faced with something like a new Babel, an inverted one where what stands to be lost is not a single language, but all of them except one. In the new inverted Babel, non-English languages become localised and provincial, peripheralised, as English is perceived as international, cosmopolitan, something like universally adequate. In light of this imbalance, translingual creative writing becomes entangled with power, demanding that we consider whether our work challenges or upholds existing inequalities in world literature, all the while doing so without losing sight of what Ha Jin calls "the cliché" that "a writer's first responsibility is to write well."[8]

Perhaps it is trite to observe that translingual writing based on language pairs with overlapping history, cultural roots, and shared writing systems is generally easier to reckon with than translingual writing between languages sharing very little, such as English and Chinese. For instance, in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, when mad monk Salvatore exclaims in "all languages, and no language... 'Cave el diabolo!...And the resto is not worth merda,'"[9] I understand even though I know just one Romance language. What's more, Salvatore's tirades would be more-or-less pronounceable even if I didn't understand them. Chinese-English translingual writing, however, evokes mysteries for which most anglophones have no clues, neither for how to pronounce it nor how to comprehend it. Andrew W. Hass writes that, for the anglophone reader, the sight of Chinese script "pushes into view the dark chasm that splits the two [language] systems" provoking the sense of an "abyss."[10] Hass's appraisal is bleak, irksome to the bilingual reader for whom this dark orientalised abyss is just plain words, however his metaphor of the abyss exemplifies the barriers translingual Chinese-English writers face in bringing their linguistic reality to literature.

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[6] Sapiro, 211.
[7] Ha Jin, The Writer as Migrant (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008) 32.
[8] Ha Jin, 28.
[9] Umberto Eco, The Name of the Rose, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co.,1994) 46.
[10] Andrew W. Hass, "Translation as Trans-literal: Radical Formation in Contemporary Chinese Art," in A Poetics of Translation: Between Chinese and English Literature, ed. Hai Wang, et al., (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016) 216.

Definitions and Origins of Translingual Writing

As a concept for academic inquiry, analysis and pedagogy, the term translingual writing is applied broadly, subsuming writing already known by more specific names such as hybrid, macaronic, exophonic, multi-, pluri-, or polylingual, and translation writing. It comes to creative writing studies from two related but different trajectories. The first is composition studies, where it proceeds chiefly as innovation in pedagogy and learning outcomes, approaching Basic Writing students' "difference[s] in language not as a barrier to overcome or as a problem to manage, but as a resource."[11] The term translingual writing came to particular prominence in composition studies in 2011 when fifty scholars endorsed a document in *College English* calling for a "new paradigm" where students' abilities in multiple languages would be preserved and nurtured. Though it shares political concerns and objectives with the research presented here, the development of translingual writing within Basic Writing education is without the scope of this chapter. Instead, we focus on the second trajectory from which translingual writing originates: literary studies.

Kellman's research is literary criticism, not a guide for creative writers on mobilizing our translingual imaginations. He provides analyses of published work of well-known authors: Vladimir Nabokov, John Coetzee, Eva Hoffman, and others producing enduring, decorated work chiefly in English. Though he does not organize it in a formal way, Kellman sets forth a de facto hierarchy of translingual writing. The first, most basic level is mimetic. Simply stated, translingual writing is a truer copy of how the world sounds. When this is done thoughtfully, it reads like Juno Diaz. When this is done glibly, it reads like the accents of J.K. Rowling's Bulgarian wizard exchange students. Kellman describes the second tier of translingual writing as conveying "mirth rather than mimesis."[12] As an example, he refers to humorous, macaronic medieval songs which combine vernacular and classical European languages. They were popular in their time and intended for ready amusement. In the contemporary era, this mirth is still found in bilingual environments like comedy sketches on my native Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The third type of translingual writing creates a "synoptic vision" which mixes languages in order to unmoor ideas from the limitations of single languages. Early twentieth century poet Ezra Pound is given as an exemplar. Kellman's highest type is the "consummate

[11] Bruce Horner, et al., "Opinion: Language Difference in Writing: Toward a Translingual Approach," in College English 73, no. 3 (Jan. 2011) 303.
[12] Kellman, 16.

translingualism"[13] of James Joyce who incorporates and improvises languages without the fanfare of italics and annotations. Joyce uses "neologism, anagrams, acrostics, palindromes, alliteration, and other verbal play" which "foregrounds language itself." [14] Kellman calls this translingualism "pandictic," the uttering of everything.[15]

Into this loose hierarchy, we may read a faulty assumption which is particularly troubling for Chinese-English translingualism. This assumption is that mirthful macaronic writing is hemmed into a level which is both separate from and inferior to those of the synoptic and pandictic. Even if we accept the progression of mimetic to macaronic to synoptic to pandictic, surely humor is possible and indeed present in all of these. For instance, Shakespeare's *Henry V* depicts Francophone princess Katherine's English lesson, code-switching, using body language, repetition, and bawdy homophones to communicate with an attentive audience regardless of their proficiency in French. The interlude provides comic relief between scenes of politics and battle, while sustaining and enhancing the viewer's sense of the tension and complexity underlying the simplest exchanges between languages.[16] Closer to our own era, Joyce's work may not be as fun as Izzard's, but his plays on words do contain elements of mirth. Word play is, after all, playful. Lightheartedness and humor do not strip writing of its pandictic potential for consummate translingualism. Beliefs about the higher, better nature of tragic literature are artefacts of Western literary criticism at least as old as Aristotle, and remain built into world literature, dogging us into the future as we develop the theory and metalanguage of translingual writing.

Bad Tattoos: Translingual Humor

A history of yellow-faced racist anglophone comedy combines with English's hyper-central position within world literature to create a climate dangerously amenable to the abuse of cheap ridicule, and the curtailing of creative and aesthetic opportunities for Chinese-English writing beyond humor. This humor works largely at the expense of Chinese, even when anglophones appear at first glance to be the butt of the joke. As a native anglophone student of Chinese, there are pet phrases I use frequently, such

[13] Kellman, 16.
[14] Kellman, 64.
[15] Kellman, 16.
[16] William Shakespeare. King Henry the Fifth. In William Shakespeare: The Complete Works (Dorchester, UK: Dorset Press, 1988) 485-519.

as "太贵了/tai gui le/It's too expensive" (even when it's not), and "我不是美国人/wo bu shi meiguoren/I am not American," and also "你为什么笑了?/ni weishenme xiao le?/Why are you laughing?" The foundation for laughter at my Chinese is laid deeper than my own heavy foreign accent and my errors. It is set in the same foundation as the inverted Babel of growing global language inequality in the face of English. Anglophones have come to expect to navigate any environment with just English, and when they struggle to breach that expectation, it's funny. The phenomenon is visible in literature in Penelope Spheeris's 1991 *Wayne's World,* a film which has not aged well as a translingual text. The main character, anglophone American Wayne Campbell, learns to speak Cantonese to impress a woman. Opposite him, Cassandra speaks accented English throughout the film, and this is no joke. Wayne, however, uses Cantonese not as a language for telling jokes, but as a joke itself. In the film, an anglophone speaking Chinese *is* the joke—set-up and punchline.[17]

This humor is not something American entertainment media left behind in the 1990s. In 2011, Hugh Jackman appeared with Conan O'Brien on late-night American television singing a song in Mandarin Chinese.[18] Jackman learned it for a role and sings from memory while O'Brien sings along, reading lyrics phonetically. When O'Brien invites the American studio audience to sing along with the teleprompter, the camera shows the crowd not singing but laughing as the music plays. The joke has degenerated beyond anglophones using Chinese, to the very idea, the mere suggestion that they could use it. In 2014, on another American talk show, Ellen DeGeneres performed a five-minute comedy bit of trying and failing to properly pronounce personal names submitted by viewers in mainland China.[19] I would rather not be laughed at when ordering tea in my local Chinatown, but for these comics, having their Chinese received like a bad tattoo is exactly the outcome they desire.

When we move beyond the spoken version of bad Chinese tattoos, into written work aspiring to be good literature, humor remains a common device. David Henry Hwang's 2011 play, *Chinglish,* takes its title from a play on "Spanglish," a hybrid of English and Spanish already established in literary work by authors such as Gloria Anzaldúa. The Theatre Communications Group's printed version of Hwang's play provides the lines spoken by

[17] Penelope Spheeris, dir. Wayne's World. (United States: Paramount Pictures, 1991).
[18] Conan. (Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers, Posted October 12, 2015). YouTube video, 2:23. www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4AMbIKv8M4
[19] Ellen. (Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers, Posted Apr. 4 2014). YouTube video, 5:25. www.youtube.com/watch?v=I4ZZ32nBVsI

Chinese characters in Hwang's original English, in more-or-less phonetic romanised Pinyin, and in traditional Chinese script [20] translated from Hwang's English in consultation with Hong Kong translator Candace Mui Ngam Chong. The play is produced with English supertitles projected along the top of the set, keeping the primarily anglophone original target audience privy to most of the jokes. In spite of this, the play challenges anglophone expectations that their language will be universally accommodated. The American lead character, Daniel Cavanaugh, closes the first scene telling a gathering of businesspeople "if you're American, it is also safe to assume that you do not speak a single fucking foreign language."[21] Apparently oblivious to the irony, he then advises the crowd that, when doing business in China, they should always bring their own translators. His advice is remarkable for what it is not. It is not an admonition to learn to speak Chinese, something he later refers to as "a solution, but an impossible one."[22] He makes this claim about impossibility even as viewers can hear him beginning to take on Chinese syntax in his English, speaking his own kind of Chinglish, different from the Chinglish of the sinophone characters.

The play's story is that of a Cleveland sign-making company looking to expand overseas, promising to fix notoriously bad English translations on signs in China. Cavanaugh arrives in Guiyang guaranteeing that his signs will have no internet meme-worthy mistranslations (in spite of an egregious mistranslation of English into Chinese on the front page of his own company website). Miscommunication can serve nearly any function in this play: as the plot, the stated theme, and the source of most of its laughs. Its ubiquity may have been what left critic Mary Houlihan calling the play's humor "one-joke comedy"[23] and reviewer Hilton Als describing it as "journalism theatre" so spare and tidy that "all that's left is a scattering of great one-liners in search of a play."[24] It seems that, without a translingual ear for the promising internal logic of Cavanaugh's Chinglish and, on the contrary, without a translingual ear for what seeps into the gaps between the spoken

[20] Traditional script is used despite the fact that simplified script is the official script of mainland China, where the play is set. This move provokes its own set of questions about the play's politics.

[21] David Henry Hwang, Chinglish (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2011) 8.

[22] Hwang, 78.

[23] Quoted in William C. Boles, Understanding Davide Henry Hwang (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2013) 115.

[24] Als Hilton, "Double-talk: Two Comedies of Miscommunication" Review of Chinglish, by David Henry Hwang, in New Yorker (31 Oct. 2011) www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/11/07/double-talk-hilton-als.

dialogue and the English of the supertitles, non-sinophones miss the multi-dimensionality of the play. As she leaves him, Cavanaugh's married Chinese lover, Xi, tells him "The romance was for me. Just for me."[25] Or so say the English supertitles. In Chinese, she says "我为自己追求罗曼蒂克，不为别人" a line which can be rendered more literally as "I for myself pursued romance, not for other people."[26] The English is Hwang's original, but for bilingual viewers, the Chinese translation spoken as dialogue brings into focus the differences between the languages, and between the human characters. The Chinese word used in Xi's line for "romance" is "罗曼蒂克." It is not a word rooted in Chinese, but a Chinese phoneticisation, a transliteration, of the English word romantic, pronounced something like luo-man-dee-keh. It is a Chinese word, but a translingual one, whether anglophones whose language comprises half of the translingual exchange recognize it or not. Xi simultaneously hides in Chinese, by using it to address monolingual Cavanaugh, but also reaches out to him with it, using a loanword she has reason to assume he may recognize, but which he does not. Further along this densely translingual line of dialogue, "Just me" in English can sound individualistic and assertive, when in Chinese, the statement is less an assertion of individual agency and more a muttered confession of neglected duty to the greater good. The word "我/wo/me" does not appear in the Chinese translation of "Just me," but "别人/bie ren/other people" does. This complexity is invisible to the non-Chinese-speaker, intentionally lost in translation right before the eyes of those who will feel its loss most keenly. At these moments, we are not laughing.

Humorous Chinese-English translingualism exists in the novel as well as in spoken media. Though Xiaolu Guo, a Chinese writer now based in the UK, wrote her 2007 novel, *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers,* in English, it is a non-normative English. Language itself is foregrounded in the diary of a language student newly arrived in London from mainland China. The opening chapters are written in deliberately error-ridden Chinese inflected English. The mistakes are no accidents, but nascent English vocabulary unfolding with traces of Chinese grammar and syntax. Through the device of over-translation, Guo's narrator makes errors such as rendering the "Ben" in "Big Ben" as if it is a Chinese character also pronounced ben, 笨, meaning stupid. This leads the narrator to call the clock tower "Big Stupid Clock."[27] Nothing in the narrative explains this joke to

[25] Hwang, 113.
[26] My intentionally overly literal translation.
[27] Xiaolu Guo, A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers (New York: Chatto & Windus, 2007) 11.

non-Chinese readers. In English, it reads as simple rudeness, and this is the point. The narrator's English is often met with annoyance. She observes, "When I start talking, I asking the rude questions."[28] When her listeners aren't annoyed, they are often laughing. The book's English becomes more standard, less foregrounded, as the novel progresses and the narrator's skills improve. In its latter half, the miscommunications become less like jokes and more like painful metaphors for cultural and linguistic barriers compounding the impossibility of truly knowing and loving another person, such as when the narrator contemplates how the English grammar of past and future tense limits a verb like love so that it "only exist in particular period of time." She reasons that "if our love existed in Chinese tense, then it will last forever."[29]

Unlike anglo-American gags about the Chinese language in popular media, Hwang and Guo traverses the "abyss" by creating voices recognisable from realistic multilingual environments, then layering over that familiarity a believable, sympathetic inner life, which is largely unseeable outside of translingual writing. The authors' tacit invitations to join in mirth at translingual characters' perceptive misperceptions ease this translingual passage over the abyss, the lightness of humor dispelling a bit of the darkness. Through mirth, the texts move closer to being pandictic, uttering more of what newcomers to English might not venture to say to anglophones. However, the full measure of both humor and of heartbreak is reserved for bilingual readers and viewers. This multi-tiered engagement with translingual texts based on consumers' language proficiencies must be kept in mind and publicly acknowledged by critics assessing translingual texts from the perspective of English alone. The more commonplace acknowledgments of the non-universality of English become, the more true they may become.

Anglophone Crossings: Trouble in the Vortex

When writers like myself—native anglophones with no ethnic connection to Chinese—cast about for exemplars to show us how to safely navigate the "abyss" from our unearned position of privilege in world literature, the models we find are mostly cautionary. Ezra Pound published what was called a translation of classical Chinese poetry in 1915 as *Cathay*. By 1954, T.S. Eliot was still saying that "Chinese poetry, as we know it to-day, is

[28] Guo, 31.
[29] Guo, 239.

something invented by Ezra Pound."[30] At the time *Cathay* was published, as Pound neither read nor spoke Chinese, his source texts were chiefly the cribs and notes of Ernest Fenollosa, a dead historian of Japanese art. Though there is abundant celebratory critical discussion of Pound's radical departure from conventional translation methods, which effectively transformed both English poetry and what was meant by translation during the Modernist movement, the politics of *Cathay* remain deeply problematic. Ming Xie explains that Pound's work becomes politically difficult where, in enthusiasm for the high quality of *Cathay* as a work of English poetry, it becomes assumed that Pound's poems "are in fact closely and directly derived from their Chinese models" when they are not.[31] This assumption disguises the genuine character of the original Chinese work, making it "an invisible tradition."[32] The imposition of exoticism and of Modernist free verse on classical Chinese poetry, along with the reductionist, Platonic essentialism implicit in Pound's aspirations of finding "a new Greece in China,"[33] and his claim to be able to do all of this without knowing Chinese himself reveal Pound's invention of Chinese poetry in English for what it is: a Western poetic movement working in simulacra,[34] creating new poetry not only based on, but insisting upon the existence of a particular Chinese original that never was. Pound's version of Chinese poetry has a "tendency to disregard real differences and historical contingencies"[35] and in this way, it is more than a reinterpretation. It is appropriation upholding world literature's steep slant toward English.

Pound defended his "translations" with heady new theories of art: imagism and later, vorticism. These theories drew focus away from abstract ideas to images and words, delving into signifiers not for what they meant, but for their energy, potential for change, and relationship to one another. As Edwin Gentzler explains, Pound believed "Chinese characters represented not meanings, not structures, but things, or more importantly, things in action, in process, things with energy...Pound's ideas were not aimed at fixed things, but at things that can change."[36] An unintended, ironic result of the translingual writing Pound produced through this theory of

[30] Quoted in Ming Xie, Ezra Pound and the Appropriation of Chinese Poetry (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999) 1.
[31] Xie, 1.
[32] Xie, 2.
[33] Quoted in Xie, 213.
[34] Xie, 211.
[35] Xie, 244.
[36] Edwin Gentzler, Contemporary Translation Theories, 2nd ed. (Cleveland: Multilingual Matters, 2001) 18-19.

change and challenge is that the revitalization of his native English fixed in place the literature in Chinese, casting it as simulacra. It became remembered in English as an artefact of Pound's project, rather than as what truly exists in classical Chinese poetry. The problem is not with Pound's English, but with his headlong lack of Chinese.

How can an anglophone writer using Chinese as language acquired later in life best navigate the terrain between bad tattoos and simulacra? It is not easy. To the errors of anglophones like Spheeris and Pound, I have added my own Chinese-English translingual writing. Foreigners' difficulties pronouncing Chinese are legendary, and part of a true mimetic representation of English-Chinese exchanges is acknowledging this. In my 2018 novel, *The Apocalypse of Morgan Turner*, I express rough Chinese spoken by anglophones by writing their dialogue romanised in Pinyin, while native Chinese speakers' dialogue is written in proper characters, highlighting the unequal quality of their messages. The move was meant to elevate the superior proficiency of sinophone characters who function in both in English and Chinese, where anglophones much more rarely gain proficiency. It was meant as an indictment of anglophone complacency, our enduring lack of multilingualism. However, this approach had its own unintended, ironic effect—further evidence, perhaps, of Jacques Derrida's notion of the inevitability of the double-binds of translation.[37] As I tried to make the nonsense of the anglophones' Chinese visible to anglophone readers, the good Chinese of the sinophone characters, the script truly capable of unproblematic communication, was made to seem more obscure. It inadvertently triggers Hass's "abyss" reaction. It was a translingual misfire.

Lighting the Abyss

The problem with Pound's transcendent approach to translingual writing lies not in the substance of his thought but in the fact that, illiterate in Chinese as he was, he was simply not qualified—linguistically or otherwise—to undertake it. A better candidate is Ha Jin, a Chinese writer now based in the United States, writing in English, eventually translated into Chinese, whose theories of writing are reminiscent of Pound's when it comes to the idea of transcendence. Unlike Pound, who explained that "the vorticist relies not upon similarity or analogy, not upon likeness or mimicry,"[38] Ha Jin argues for translingual writing based not on the

[37] Derrida, Jacques. "Des Tours de Babel." In Differences in Translation. Translated by Joseph Graham. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985) 165-248. www.sas.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/Derrida_Babel.pdf.
[38] Quoted in Gentzler, 17.

differences and distinctions between languages but on their similarities--what is revealed in the "likeness" Pound eschewed. His version of the pandictic is a "language of synthesis."[39] Where, as Lawrence Venuti points out, Pound's excessive "focus on the signifier, creat[es] an opacity that calls attention to itself"[40] and sets the scene for the kind of simulacra described above, Ha Jin works toward "language beyond mere signifiers," a transcendence within a safeguarded context, yielding writing which, "if rendered into different languages, especially into the language spoken by the people the author writes about, the work still remains meaningful."[41]

From Ha Jin's short fiction, it is clear that he and Pound differ in their emphasis on syntax. Pound dismisses it as abstract, focusing instead on things, while Ha Jin makes syntax an instrument for translingual estrangement. Haoming Gong calls Ha Jin's work "translation literature," noting that, though he writes in English, his work has the feel of a translated text and lends itself to translation into Chinese.[42] This is achieved through literalness which gives the anglophone target audience a sense of defamiliarization, an inkling of "the absurdity of being imprisoned within a particular language."[43] In the short story "After Cowboy Chicken Came to Town," the Chinese manager of an American-based fast food restaurant uses the English idiom "the straw that broke the camel's back," but written from the point of view of Chinese workers who speak little English, it reads as "You don't add the last straw to collapse the camel."[44] Stilted syntax in a retold idiom undermines Pound, showing that even when familiar images are preserved, it is syntax that makes us at home in our language's idioms. The reader's own literalness is turned against us at times. One wonders what the narrator means when he talks about the American boss "listening to a tape to learn the ABCs of Chinese."[45] Knowing there is no Chinese alphabet, an anglophone reading literally is left with the sense that something has been glossed, over-translated, lost, all the while knowing that there has been no

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[39] Ha Jin, 59.
[40] Lawrence Venuti, The Translator's Invisibility (London: Routledge, 2018) 29.
[41] Ha Jin, 59.
[42] Haoming Gong, "Language, Migrancy, and the Literal: Ha Jin's Translation Literature," in Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies 40.1 (March 2014) 148.
[43] Gong, 149.
[44] Ha Jin, "After Cowboy Chicken Comes to Town," in The Bridegroom (New York: Vintage International, 2000) 192-3. This idiom is not unknown in Chinese, usually translated from English as "压死骆驼的稻草/ya si luo tou de dao cao," literally, "the straw that crushed the camel to death." Thanks to Guo Wangtaolue for this insight.
[45] Ha Jin, 198.

translation, and the original text is the English before us. The effect is one of provocative estrangement, drawing the reader into an act of synthesis between themself and the author, their language drawn into the translingualism of the text.

On the balance between the politics and the artistry of translingual writing, Ha Jin is unequivocal: a writer's "social role is secondary[...]and it has little to do with his value as a writer."[46] This is not to say that social activism in art is not important, but rather, that the relationship between activism and art is paradoxical, the sort of relationship where (to hazard another biblical allusion) whosoever will lose their social role for art's sake shall find it. In Ha Jin's own words, "The meanings, the human experiences, and above all, the artistic spirit will survive and can resonate to other audiences if the work is genuine literature."[47] As an anglophone writer, I contemplated this with trepidation, reluctant to accept something that reads like a pass. But the "if" in this statement sets the same impossible, circular condition we always face as writers. Our work will be good enough as long as our work is good enough. Only, Ha Jin doesn't talk about whether work is good, but whether it is "genuine." Ezra Pound's work may have been good, but it was not genuine. Genuine translingual writers differ from those of us who botch it—the Pounds and the comics—in that the creators of genuine work know each of the languages they handle, perhaps not with perfect intimacy but well enough to engage with small features such as syntax because, in truth, there are no small features; well enough to be comfortable even without laughter; well enough to remain committed when the novelty of obscurity no longer dazzles; well enough that, even if they still see an abyss, it is not a dark pit but a sun-lit canyon lush with life.

[46] Ha Jin (2008), 28.
[47] Ha Jin (2008), 60.

CHAPTER EIGHT

RAISING THE BAR: REFLECTIONS AND ANECDOTES LINKED TO WRITING, TEACHING AND THE TEACHING OF WRITING

JOE ORSMOND

Abstract

This chapter tries to make sense of the complexities of teaching creative writing as a writer and as an older student. Written from the perspective of being a high school English teacher who has enrolled in a Master's degree, it explores the tangible effects further study and writing has on teaching writing. Divided into 7 sections, each part of the chapter deals with different aspects of why and how to teach creative writing. Reflective and anecdotal in nature, the chapter combines tangible examples within a more philosophical framework to try and give writers who teach creative writing some direction on how to approach the classroom. While looking at new ways to teach, its central thesis is that there is a wealth of rich source material in teaching and that a move toward fully embracing the art of teaching creative writing (and the doubt and uncertainty linked to how to do this properly) could ultimately result in better writing and more content teachers who write.

Keywords: Doubt, Silence, Editing, Hope, Enactment, Stories

1.

In the 1960s there was an athlete who, by all accounts, was obsessed with a particular field event. Richard Douglas Fosbury was not particularly good at high jump, but he liked it. In speculating, one could probably go so far as

to say that he loved it. Fosbury was obviously drawn to something in the elemental aspects of the sport, which made him want to compete. The problem though, was that he was not very good at high jump. In fact, he could barely compete at a state level and any hope he had of competing at a higher level, seemed unlikely. What options did Fosbury have? This question is not asked in any kind of rhetorical way. Consider, carefully, what options he had to improve his situation. Even though there seems to be a growing global narrative which suggests that he could have just "worked his way" to success, this seldom improves matters (unless you are not working very hard to begin with). Fosbury only had four options available to him. He could have quit (but if he truly loved the sport, that would have been pointless). He could change his sport (again, if he loved the sport, that would have been futile). He could have lowered his personal expectations (a reasonable option, unless performance was important to him). Lastly, he could look at as many of the parameters which make up the sport he loved and, from there, see if there were not different options and approaches in terms of how he had performed before.

The "Fosbury Flop" might seem to be a strange starting point for a chapter on the teaching of creative writing, but the lesson contained in it have real application for encouraging students and teachers to be the best writers they can possibly be.

Richard Fosbury was one of those fortunate athletes who is blessed with the perfect blend of doubt and certainty. If Fosbury had been an athlete beset by doubt, he might have questioned so much of his sport that, in the end, the very idea of jumping over an ever increasing bar would have seemed ridiculous. Likewise, if there was an absolute certainty about what he was doing, he might have carried on and on in the manner he was trained and would never have improved significantly. However, when there is enough doubt within you to question how you approach your chosen activity, then much opportunity lies on the horizon.

Fosbury, whether he realized it or not, became an Olympic champion and Olympic record holder because of an inclination which, unfortunately in today's world, is being eradicated from all forms of education. Richard Fosbury embraced doubt and used it to grow. John Patrick Shanley, in his introduction to his play, *Doubt*, speaks about this fertile space. He says:

> It is Doubt (so often experienced initially as weakness) that changes things. When a man feels unsteady, when he falters, when hard-won knowledge evaporates before his eyes, he's on the verge of growth. The subtle or violent reconciliation of the outer person and the inner core often seems at first like a mistake, like you've gone the wrong way and you're lost. But this is just emotional longing for the familiar. Life happens when the tectonic power of

> your speechless soul breaks through the dead habits of the mind. Doubt is nothing less than an opportunity to reenter the Present…Doubt requires more courage than conviction does, and more energy, because conviction is a resting place and doubt is infinite — it is a passionate exercise…Look down on that feeling [of conviction]. We've got to learn to live with a full measure of uncertainty. There is no last word.[1]

Do all writers and teachers of creative writing believe in the intrinsic parameters of the pursuit we love and are drawn to? High jump, as a sport, is ruled by rules linked to jumping as high as you can over the bar. Likewise, writing is fixed by the inclination to put the best words down onto a page. If, as a writer, you do not like that idea, that is fine, but then you should probably look for (or maybe even invent) another activity to perform or compete in. That is said with no animosity or sense of irony at all.

If writing is a necessary condition for you to live "fully", then the obvious question you need to ask yourself is: how do I get the best "performances" out of my writing? Here, one needs to look carefully at what you want to do and what you are prepared to do differently. Here it is important (as a teacher and as a writer) to perform a dual role. One has to, in fulfilling both roles, try and cultivate one's own best work, but one also needs to actively try to elicit the best work one can from one's students.

2.

A few years ago, I went to an exhibition at the Tate Modern Gallery, entitled *Picasso 1932*. The exhibition was centered around one year of Picasso's life. It was an incredible sight to see so much output.

Surely, in Picasso's mind, not all of it would have been good, but he knew output was key. In terms of all of our creative writing endeavors, one cannot expect to be good, better or the best, unless there is output. As teachers of creative writing, we suspect that if we want our students to be great, there needs to be regular and sustained output. This is a necessary condition. The likelihood of anyone producing good pieces of writing, without writing regularly, is so miniscule that it is not even worth considering. As a teacher of writing though, never let students ever believe that output is a guarantee of success. A necessary condition does not guarantee the performance you desire.

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[1] Shanley, John Patrick. 2005. *Doubt*. 2nd ed. Theatre Communications Group: New York, https://www.amphi.com/cms/lib/AZ01901095/Centricity/Domain/245/DoubtScript.pdf. Pg. 6-7.

What does guarantee success? That is, a trickier question to answer. There are so many variables out there, that there is obviously no blue print. In Christopher Nolan's film, *Inception*, the protagonist asks the following question:

> What is the most resilient parasite? A bacteria? A virus? An intestinal worm?... An idea. Resilient, highly contagious. Once an idea has taken hold of the brain it's almost impossible to eradicate. An idea that is fully formed, fully understood. That sticks, right in there somewhere [he points to his head].[2]

The author Brian Evenson understood this. He has seen its power in the act of writing.

> Stories… are meant to function beyond their initial reading, in the way readers choose over time to process the reading experience and supply their own moral response to the absence of response within the text proper. A sort of virus, as it were. [3]

As writers and teachers, what do we want to stick in our readers' heads and how do we use language and style and storytelling to make the ideas we have adhesive enough? Likewise, what do teachers of writing want to put into our student's heads?

3.

Once, at the start of an academic term, I did something out of the ordinary. I cleared an enormous 5-meter by 1.5-meter pin-up board in my classroom and filled it with the pieces of poetry I had assembled for my thesis I was busy completing. Four rows of roughly 25 pieces exposed to each and every class I taught. I told them what the pieces were. And why they were up there. In the subsequent months, classes saw me put lines through entire pieces, ticks when a piece has been edited to a satisfactory level and the tentative steps of sequencing. All the time, students asked questions about the process of editing. Why? Because they saw that the perceived master, had to do what he teaches. That process is something experienced not just taught. I hope I have planted a virus in their heads about the process and joys of editing.

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[2] Nolan, Christopher. *Inception*, 2010. [DVD], United States of America: Warner Brothers Pictures.

[3] Evenson, Brian. 2002. *Altmann's Tongue: Stories and a Novella*. 1st ed. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press. Pg. 272.

As teachers of creative writing we need to evaluate, constantly, where we are taking our students, because the difference between opening new worlds and opportunities, and pushing students into areas is often very little. I think we also need to be aware of the power of being seen to be "doing". As George Steiner says in his book *Lessons of the Masters, "*Exemplary teaching is enactment and can be mute. Perhaps it ought to be"[4]. Doubt is what teaching creative writing is all about and challenging students in ways that provide just enough of it is vital. Giving students the tangible you as a teacher believe in is also appropriate and right when they are maybe overwrought with doubt and do not know where to start. And, when work and productivity are effortless in nature and going along swimmingly, do not underestimate the value of just being seen to be doing. Do not mistake lessons, consultations and lectures dominated by silence as being in any way counterproductive or lacking in educational benefit.

I was reminded of this when preparing to teach *The Dream House*. (A South African novel by Craig Higginson used as a set work for a school leaving qualification in South Africa). In the introduction by the author, he says the following about the couple who were the inspiration for the novel:

> I think the people who invited me into their home would be faintly horrified by what I've made of them. The farmer's wife would be amazed that Janet Suzman played her on London's West End. They had no idea there was anything artistic about me. If they had known, they would have laughed at it. They have long ago passed into the darkness we all come from – and these days it sometimes feels as if I simply imagined them. They were people of their time, increasingly uneasy in a world that was rapidly outstripping them. But they were kind to me. Most of all, they left me alone.[5]

"Most of all, they left me alone." There is something to be said to be left alone. Being alone and being left alone are two very different scenarios. Today, it is hard to be left alone. We are too connected and too dependent on that connectivity to have access to regular "alone-ness". Let us not fool ourselves. Writing is a solitary business and the need to be left alone – truly and completely – is an area where teachers can, and should, help students. And it is in this space of seemingly "nothing", where wonderful things like boredom, wandering, doodles, scribbles, words and sentences happen (almost by chance). Interestingly, it is in this fertile space of "nothingness" that structures and spaces can be developed.

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[4] Steiner, George. 2005. *Lessons of the Masters*. 2nd ed. Massachusetts: First Harvard University Press. Pg. 4.

[5] Higginson, Craig. 2016. *The Dream House*. 2nd ed. Johannesburg: Picador Africa. Pg. X (of the Introduction).

4.

At the end of 2017, I took a monumental step to write. I have always been the person who has a great many wonderful thoughts. I can play the educational game of "saying the right thing at the right time", but writing, like art, gives you no place to hide. Everything is revealed. I would like to take you through that process. It starts with an important lesson, taught to me by my Grade 9 English class (ages 14 – 15 years old) from that year. I liked that class, but they infuriated me with their mark hunting. I would mark and they would argue searching for marks. They believed that the desire to perform was good enough. I could relate to this. In my mind the desire to write well should be good enough to produce good work. Both of us were in for hard lessons!

That year I decided to apply to join the Masters in Creative Writing course at Rhodes University. The application form was easy to fill out. Going to the bank for the bank transfer for the application fee was a doddle. I really felt, at this stage, I was well on my way to being a great, world-renowned writer. I was ticking off boxes and my desire to write well, filled my heart. One small problem: the 40+ page portfolio of writing combined with a crazy 3rd Term and two toddlers going through some interesting "developmental stages" which seemed to prohibit them from sleeping at all. The desire was there though, and for 8 weeks I pulled 4am to 6am writing sessions just about daily. No one could doubt my commitment or desire anymore. Writing success was guaranteed. At the end of that process, as with what I do with my report comments at the end of each term, I took the portfolio to my mother who lives in a retirement village just up the road and asked her to proofread it. I waited two days, a bit surprised that I had not received any glowing text message claiming that these were the greatest collection of poems and short stories she had ever read, but I was sure this praise would come. She is my mother after all! Eventually I went up to see her. The portfolio, looked relatively error free, so I asked, "What did you think?" A pause too long for my liking. And then the knockout blow from her. "There were some brilliant pieces in there" she replied. "… and some very pedestrian pieces". I left sulking. Defeated. I did not visit her for a week. Deprived her of her weekly bread and milk shop. I was fuming… because she was right and I knew it. Shortly after this event, I marked narrative essays for that Grade 9 class I spoke about. Many pupils, for whatever reason, were off the mark and it showed in the symbol they achieved. In a lesson, after lunch, we sat with our works. The 9s with their essays and me with my portfolio. I phoned my mom in that lesson. Hooked her up to the computer's speakers (who says I can't integrate technology

into my lessons) and told her that we had just decided to phone her on a whim. See how she was doing. See what the weather was like up there. Also, with all 25 boys listening, could she please repeat what she said to me about my portfolio. Down the unfortunately crystal clear line came the words, again: "some brilliant pieces… some very pedestrian ones".

"Why didn't you lie, mom?" Her response? "Because that wouldn't have helped anyone." There, before my Masters had even begun, was the single most important lesson I have taken away from writing and teaching.

Raymond Carver and Isak Dinesen both spoke about "writing a little every day, without hope or despair"[6]. To me, these words resonate. In fact, it was due to these words that, for a long time, I had the words from Dante's *Divine Comedy* to the entrance of my classroom. "Abandon hope all ye who enter here". These words though were not a public statement voicing my displeasure at my classroom. I love my classroom. No. It was a directive to my pupils. In part inspired by *The Guardian* columnist Oliver Burkeman' reflection on Dante's words. He said:

> Scratch the surface of our hope-fixated culture and you discover *The Shawshank Redemption* lied to us: sometimes, giving up hope sets you free. John Ptacek, a US author, writes of finding meaning through hopelessness after his wife's terminal cancer diagnosis: "Time spent hoping for happier days is time spent turning away from life." Derrick Jensen, an environmental campaigner, believes hope makes activism less effective since it involves placing faith in someone or something else to make things better, instead of doing what's needed yourself: "A wonderful thing happens when you give up on hope, which is that you realise you never needed it in the first place… you become very dangerous indeed to those in power." The Buddhist nun Pema Chödrön proposes a new fridge magnet: "Abandon hope". It sounds like a grim joke. After all, if you don't have hope, what's left? I suspect she'd answer: reality. In other words, everything.[7]

This was an incredible moment of realization for me: writing as an engagement with our reality without hope and without despair. Of course,

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[6] Carver, Raymond. 2005. Principles of a Story. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.theshortstory.org.uk/writers/Essay-Carver-3.pdf. [Accessed 8 May 2018]. *Prospect*, September 2005. This essay first appeared in the "New York Times Book Review" in 1981 as "A Storyteller's Notebook." Entitled *"On Writing,"* it is included in *"Fires: Essays, Poems, Stories"* (Harvill Press) by Raymond Carver. © 1968 to 1988 by Raymond Carver, 1989 to present by Tess Gallagher. Pg. 32.

[7] Burkeman, Oliver. 2014. "This Column Will Change Your Life: The Case Against Hope". *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/apr/12/change-your-life-case-against-hope.

being the deeply cynical human being that I am, the second part, "without despair", was a tough one to deal with. And it was only once I had read one of my favorite columnists, a man by the name of George Monbiot, saying:

> To be at peace with a troubled world: this is not a reasonable aim. It can be achieved only through a disavowal of what surrounds you. To be at peace with yourself within a troubled world: that, by contrast, is an honourable aspiration.[8]

Only once I had internalized all of this, was I ready to write, properly, for myself and to encourage my pupils to write with similar approaches.

5.

Of course, being ready to write and writing are two very different notions. One of the greatest parts of a Masters in Creative Writing is the expectation that you read widely. The poets and writers that I have been exposed to over this time-frame have been mind-blowing. They have destroyed all notions and preconceived ideas I had about what is good writing. The traditional foundations and beliefs I held, even as a teacher of English, as to what was permissible and not so, are out the window. So how have I started to see and experience writing differently?

Poetics and narratives, in my mind, matter as much as the story and plot. They are linked. Stories are not told in totality of scope, but "the manner in which the story is told reflects its own intentions"[9] as Njabo Ndebele reminds us in his book, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary*. This strikes to the heart of the matter. This is the kernel of information which has underpinned all other discoveries of mine during the course of this year.

Paul Auster, the American author, once said that "Stories happen only to those who are able to tell them, … In the same way, perhaps, experiences present themselves only to those who are able to have them"[10]. This idea resonates, but what does it mean? Brian Evenson, in his Afterword to his seminal piece, *Altman's Tongue* elaborates on the link between experience

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[8] Monbiot, George. 2014. "Sick of This Market-Driven World? You Should Be | George Monbiot". *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/aug/05/neoliberalism-mental-health-rich-poverty-economy.

[9] Ndebele, Njabo. 2006. *Rediscovery of the Ordinary*. 1st ed. Durban: UKZN Press. Pg. 45

[10] Auster, Paul. 2006. *The New York Trilogy: city of glass, ghosts & the locked room*. 3rd ed. Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg. Pg. 216

and the act of writing. His experiences informed his writing, yet there was always an intentionality in what he wrote. He "listened to … stories… trying not to judge them or react too strongly… just listening, maintaining a neutral voice"[11]. I like the idea of trying to look at the world you see in as neutral manner as possible, devoid of emotion and prejudice (even if contemporary theory drives the idea that bias is unavoidable). This is an important first step so that when you do write, it is from a position of having had your eyes as wide open as possible. If your observations of the world are as accurate and as honest as you can manage, only then can you populate the creative worlds you will build by "vocalizing what [characters] needed to say about themselves"[12].

Language and structure in writing are fences. They contain and enclose information into units which the writer feels are manageable, important and/or necessary. Language and structure are access points into the world of the writer and as Craig Santos Perez says: "access is power"[13]. The more I look at the conventions and structures of prose writing and poetry, the more I wonder what originally new ways have been (or can be) opened up by writers. I feel there are still too many certainties and too many fixed points we cling to as readers, writers and teachers (even though the world is a changed and changing place). The poet, William Carlos Williams, alludes to this when he uses the analogy of Newtonian physics and the monumental shifts brought about due to advances by the likes of Einstein. Imagine, he says, "the early feeling of Einstein toward the laws of Isaac Newton in physics… From being fixed... values… [were suddenly and] rightly… seen as only relatively true"[14]. That space must have been such an incredibly interesting space to inhabit. Where all that you took for granted, evaporated. Where a new ideas and approaches came into existence. Has this happened in the teaching of writing? Can it?

It can, but we need to look carefully at the larger world around us to find areas where we can forge new structural ways forward. As such, every time we watch a play, listen to music, consume a series, look at graffiti, watch a

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[11] Evenson, Brian. 2002. *Altmann's Tongue: Stories and a Novella*. 1st ed. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press. Pg. 269.

[12] *Ibid*.,270.

[13] Perez, Craig Santos. 2014. *From Unincorporated Territory [guma']*. 1st ed. Oakland California: Omnidawn Publishers. Pg. 254.

[14] Williams, William Carlos. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69393/the-poem-as-a-field-of-action William Carlos Williams, "The Poem as a Field of Action" from *Selected Essays of William Carlos William*s, copyright ©1954 by William Carlos Williams. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corporation. Originally Published: October 13th, 2009. Pg. 4.

live performance of dance, read a poem, hear a poem read aloud or listen to a speaker at a conference writers and teachers have a responsibility to be actively seeking out not only content for what they write and teach, but also ways in which they can use these to examine the structures and conventions of their own writing and teaching.

A prime example of this is my recent experience with the television series, *The Sopranos*. Spoiler alert! The ending of the show, was a revolutionary act. A duplicated protagonist at the start. A black screen and silence at the end results in the audience being completely unaware of what happened to the protagonist of the show in the end. Does he live? Does he die? Are these the questions to be asking? Traditional narratives would have held your hand far more. They would have given you, the audience, a clearer sense of an ending, but why is this required? Does a story need to end with the resolution almost always expected? Does life provide resolution? All I do know is the lack of a neat, tidy ending has made me think about many more elements of the show than I would normally have, if the ending had subscribed to the conventions of "traditional" storytelling.

Likewise, when we engage with newness, do not dismiss that which seems strange or foreign straight off. Augusto Monterroso, the Honduran writer and poet, taught me this in his short story *El Dinosaurio*. The entire story is comprised of only eight words and seems to raise more questions than answers through its content. Who is "he"? Who is the dinosaur? Is the dinosaur symbolic? Is the story in any way literal? So many questions. So much doubt about old forms and new ways.

What I have found is that my students have responded so well to exposure to new and different stories like these. If you show them "unconventional" it positions all writing in new ways. Indeed, all of their writing is positioned in new ways.

6.

My students have seen me do the following as I have furthered my studies. They have seen me read and write (regularly and widely). They have seen me scribbling down thoughts and ideas, and turn them into poems, stories and lectures. They have seen an entire noticeboard filled with works which have been edited, removed and rearranged. They have seen me succeed and most times fail. They have seen all of this transpire while I have been gripped by one certain, undeniable belief. That writing matters. Like Richard Fosbury believed in the bar, I too believe in the value of my own bar. How you get over it is, at the end of the day, down to the individual, but the value and importance of the bar remains.

The result of all of I have spoken about is that I will need to put "what… [I] know [and do] at risk"[15]. And the reason why I will have to do this? Quite simply because "as long as traditional forms are driven and held in god-like standing the author or poet will continue to promote conventions or norms"[16] (whether explicitly or implicitly).

In the end, I do not know what to do with so many new ideas linked to writing and teaching? I have started to doubt what I want to do during this creative journey. I am, however, reminded of John Patrick Shanley's words (at the beginning of this chapter) about this very state of being.

7.

I took in a set of essays once and they waited for way too long before they were marked. I think they waited until a half term holiday in fact. I finally tackled them. There, deep in that stack, lay the story of an act. An event so abhorrent, so sickening that my stomach turned. I did not know what to do with that information. Out of the depths of my anguish, I consulted psychologists and councilors to see what I should do with this information. Through some phenomenal advice from them I came up with a plan. Not a plan, but a process. I won't go into what was written, or what happened to the pupil. I want to talk about the writing. What courage. What incredible courage to write. Not to ignore or pretend away a story which had to be told. And if I am to sing my praises. What a burden, to carry day in and day out. What a tremendous burden. What a privilege to have been given that weight to carry that. My most profound moment as teacher? Probably. Once portfolios were called and a record of work was no longer needed, I remember taking that essay and going into my backyard early one morning, before the world awoke, and burning it. Its work was done. It no longer needed to exist anymore.

Taking ourselves and our classes to as many new and fertile creative places as possible (and seeing what the journeys there produce) is all we as writers and teachers of creative writing can do. The beauty about writing,

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[15] Evenson, Brian. 2002. *Altmann's Tongue: Stories and a Novella*. 1st ed. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press. Pg. 278.

[16] Lauterbach, Ann. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69528/use-this-word-in-a-sentence-experimental, "Use This Word in a Sentence: 'Experimental'" from *The Night Sky: Writings on the Poetics of Experience*. Copyright © 2005 by Ann Lauterbach. Used by permission of Viking Penguin, a division of Penguin Group (USA), Inc. For on-line information about other Penguin Group (USA) books and authors, see the Internet website at: http://www.penguin.com. Originally Published: May 12th, 2010. Pg. 2.

teaching and teaching writing is that it ultimately allows for so many different special journeys to happen (and these journeys are not confined to the teacher, the student or indeed the writer).

There is, seemingly, a sense that it is often somehow a failing on the part of a writer or poet that one has to teach in order sustain ones writing. I hope that, through this chapter, the reader can start to see that this is the furthest thing from the truth. As writers and teachers of writing, we have access to some incredibly special places. We need to use this privileged access afforded to us to make ourselves better writers and better teachers.

> We spend our lives, knowingly or not, trying to say something impeccably. We long to put the right words in the right order. (That, Coleridge said, is all that poetry really comes down to.) And when we do, we are on the lip of adding something to the language. We've perhaps made a contribution, however small, to what the critic R.P. Blackmur called the stock of available reality. And when we do, we've lived for a moment with the immortals.[17]

What an honour, privilege and responsibility it is to initiate and drive this process as a writer and teacher. I could not think of a more creative place I would rather occupy.

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[17] Edmundson, Mark. 2014. *Why Teach?* 2nd ed. New York: Bloomsbury. Pg. 116-117.

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Williams, William Carlos. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69393/the-poem-as-a-field-of-action William Carlos Williams, "The Poem as a Field of Action" from *Selected Essays of William Carlos William*s, copyright ©1954 by William Carlos Williams. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corporation. Originally Published: October 13th, 2009.

CHAPTER NINE

FINDING THE PAST IN THE LANDSCAPE OF THE PRESENT: THE PRACTICE OF KINESTHETIC RESEARCH

ALISON GOODMAN

Abstract

The chapter investigates and codifies kinesthetic research, an under-examined research methodology that is often employed by historical fiction writers. Kinesthetic research involves the writer physically visiting the contemporary locations in which they set their historical fiction, and/or engaging in historical activities such as dancing or weapons training. In this chapter I will introduce the goals of kinesthetic research, including historical authenticity, and the concept of *footstepping*, a biography writing methodology that I have adapted for the field of fiction writing. I will then discuss the importance of empathy in kinesthetic research, and its kinship to concepts within neuro-psychology and empathy in Stanislavski's physical action method of acting. Finally, I will explore the goals and practices of kinesthetic research via interviews with internationally published historical fiction authors and discuss how the methodology can help a writer build a sensory, intellectual and emotional bridge between contemporary locations and the historical settings of her fiction.

Keywords: footstepping, historical fiction, creative writing, writing practice, empathy, authenticity

It is the 10th May 2015 and I am walking alongside Rotten Row, the track reserved for horse riding in Hyde Park, London. I am hyper-alert, noting pale sunlight through the tree canopy, the grassy tang of horse dung, thudding hooves on the "tan" and a snatch of breathy conversation as two riders pass by. I take a photo on my phone as a reminder of what I can see

from a point along the Row where I imagine my fictional characters in 1812 will stand; a visual note to accompany this soaking in of sensory information. I am engaging in what I call kinesthetic research, a methodology used by fiction writers in many genres, but particularly by historical fiction writers in their search to create a sense of authenticity in their historical settings.

Within the field of historical fiction writing, kinesthetic research is a research practice that involves an author physically visiting the contemporary locations in which they set their historical fiction, and/or engaging in activities that their historical characters would undertake, such as walking the same streets, inhabiting similar rooms or spaces or dancing in the mode of the time. I have borrowed the term kinesthetic from the education field where it is used to describe learning through action. By moving through the site of their historical setting, an author aims to gather a physical, emotional and intellectual understanding of that space in an earlier time. My investigation into kinesthetic research is focused on historical fiction because setting is a key pleasure in the genre and historical authenticity is expected by its readers. This chapter will provide a preliminary examination of the methodology in practice. To begin, the chapter will introduce the methodology of kinesthetic research and the concept of *footstepping*, a biography writing research methodology that I have adapted for fiction writing. I will then discuss the main aim of kinesthetic research—historical authenticity—and the core idea of *informed creative empathy* with reference to Stanislavski's action centred approach to acting and to recent findings in neuro-psychology. Finally, I will explore the practice and use of kinesthetic research using interviews with historical fiction authors that I have so far completed and transcribed.

At the outset it must be noted that this type of research comes with a great deal of privilege. It implies a level of able-bodiedness in order to visit a physical site, which can be difficult for those authors with disabilities if there is limited access or institutional/indirect ablelist attitudes. It also requires a time investment—sometimes weeks—and can involve significant financial outlay, especially if the writer lives in another country. For example, I live in Australia and conduct my kinesthetic research in England for fiction set in 1812 London. On occasion, some financial and time opportunities can be found through grants and residencies, but these are rare and generally it is the author investing in their own creative process.

Thus, it is also important to note that kinesthetic research is, obviously, not the only way a writer can create a convincing historical setting. Brilliant historical novels have been written with traditional primary and secondary resources to hand. Modern writers have also had access, since the end of the

twentieth century, to the image and information power of the internet, which would, one might think, make such a methodology as kinesthetic research obsolete. Yet I and many other writers continue to physically visit the contemporary locations of our historical settings. Clearly, we gain valuable data from the methodology that is important to our creation of historical setting and character that we feel cannot be found via these other forms of research.

Kinesthetic research is often discussed on panels at festivals and conventions in the form of anecdotes as a way of enlivening the subject of research. Antonia Fraser, biographer and memoirist, is a keen practitioner of a similar methodology she calls optical research and has written about the methodology in a collection of "tales" by well-known biographers about the trials of biography writing.[1] It is also often mentioned during author interviews, again to add a visceral dimension to the research process. One such interview is between host Kelly Gardiner and historical fiction author Catherine Padmore in the *Imagine the Past* podcast series for the Historical Novelists Society of Australia[2]. In the interview, Gardiner describes the process as "walking the ground" and both she and Padmore agree that the research not only provides a prompt for imagination but also satisfies a sense of obligation to the past. For them, the methodology also holds an ethical or perhaps even a spiritual dimension that is echoed in the interviews I have conducted.

As well as being a topic of interview discussion, kinesthetic research also appears as a subject in author biographies such as Adam Sisman's biography of John Le Carre[3]. Despite the widespread use of the method, however, the steps in the process and the reasons for adopting it are rarely examined in detail.

One notable exception is Kate Grenville's *Search for the Secret River* in which she explores the process of writing her historical novel *The Secret River* inspired by her great-great grandfather Solomon Wiseman. After a research trip to London, Grenville writes

> I knew I wanted to go on looking for my great-great grandfather, and most of all to go again to his house at Wiseman's Ferry. What I'd learned in London about finding the past in the landscape of the present could be

[1] Fraser, Antonia. "Optical Research." In *Lives for Sale: Biographers' Tales*, edited by Mark Bostridge. (London: Continuum, 2004).
[2] Gardiner, Kelly. *Imagining the Past.* Podcast audio. Interview with Catherine Padmore 2017.
[3] Sisman, Adam. *John Le Carré: The Biography*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

> applied to that half-remembered place too. [4]

Grenville acknowledges the compulsion and the benefits of the methodology and also points to the core of the process; it is a method of research that requires engagement through motion—or, at the very least, through physical presence.

How then does the process of "doing" via kinesthetic research help an author build a sensory, intellectual and emotional bridge between their contemporary locations and the historical settings of their fiction? And in doing so, can they pave a way to the mindset of their historical characters and a deeper sense of authenticity?

What constitutes historical authenticity in fiction is an area that is hotly debated[5]. As Gillian Polack notes in her exploration of history and fiction,

> when writers think about any period or place in history, they are really thinking about a mediated set of narratives about places and times that are unreachable.[6]

Writers are informed by, among other things, their culture, received narratives of historical events by historians and other art practitioners, and the aims and genre conventions of their fiction. The history that we know is already based on stories—albeit set on a foundation of facts—and the truth of it, as Polack says, is unreachable.

Thus historical authenticity is a perceived authenticity by both writer and reader. For the purposes of my investigation into kinesthetic research, historical authenticity implies an adherence to historical fact by the writer, alongside a sense of "rightness" about an era that encompasses physical locations, political and social structures, idiom, mood, and the emotional and intellectual perspectives and beliefs of the characters.

Historical authenticity is also bound up with the deftness of delivery and the choice of detail. The concepts of *presentism* and *necessary anachronism*—in which reader genre expectations may be at odds with an author's desire to keep faith with the settings or stay within the cultural mores of the time—sit alongside Margaret Margaronis's thoughts about how the modern historical fiction writer must also be aware of the influence of modernism

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[4] Grenville, Kate. *Searching for the Secret River*. (Melbourne: Text Publishing Company, 2006).

[5] For an overview of the debate, see De Groot, Jerome. *The Historical Novel*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).

[6] Polack, Gillian. *History and Fiction : Writers, Their Research, Worlds and Stories*. (Oxford ; Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2016).

and post-modernism, from which comes the tenet that all experience is subjective and every narrative is partial.

So is historical authenticity even achievable? Maria Margaronis supplies us with an overview of the debate:

> the novel unfolds in the space between these two apparently divergent points of view—the novelist has an obligation to strict accuracy, and that there is no such thing as an objective account of experience.[7]

In other words, writing historical fiction is a constant balancing act between providing accurate information and the funneling of an era through the subjectivity of characterisation. Hilary Mantel, historical novelist and two-time Man Booker Prize winner, notes in her Reith lecture series for the BBC,

> your real job as a novelist, is not to be an inferior sort of historian, but to recreate the texture of lived experience: to activate the senses, and to deepen the reader's engagement through feeling.[8]

The historical fiction writer is not bound by the expectations placed upon the historian which Gillian Polack defines as "a narrow use of sources and the demand for a precise set of carefully formulated question and answer in relation to those sources [that] leads to a better understanding of that element of the past."[9] Instead, the historical fiction writer is expected to create a perceived sense of authenticity through the use of imagined sensory detail, and a depiction of the time that takes into account a general overview of the era's social, political and emotional sensibilities. For the purpose of clarity, I am differentiating the term historical accuracy from historical authenticity, although they are often used interchangeably. In my investigation, historical accuracy implies the same adherence to fact, as it is currently received, but unlike historical authenticity does not involve Mantel's recreation of the texture of lived experience.

The issues around historical authenticity could easily swallow the whole of this chapter. However, as my investigation is positioned squarely within the field of creative writing studies, the thorny subject of historical authenticity will be explored only in terms of its status as one of the major

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[7] Margaronis, Maria. "The Anxiety of Authenticity: Writing Historical Fiction at the End of the Twentieth Century," *History Workshop Journal* (2008).
[8] Mantel, Hilary. "Reith Lectures: Hilary Mantel: Can These Bones Live?," in *Reith Lectures* (www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08wp3g3: BBC Radio 4, 2017).
[9] Polack

genre conventions of historical fiction and a significant goal of the methodology under investigation. In this investigation, historical authenticity is viewed through the prism of practice: in this case, the practice of kinesthetic research.

Kinesthetic research is patently not a new concept. It is cousin to the practices of immersion and re-enactment, but its focus is on the gathering of information to create a sense of place and historical period in a fictional work. It is also related to the methodology of footstepping, a term coined by Richard Holmes in the field of biography writing. Footstepping is a method—considered somewhat radical in the biographical field—that is used to deepen the understanding of the subject and the world in which the subject lived. In his *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer*, Holmes describes the process of research for the biographer.

> The first [element] is the gathering of factual materials, the assembling in the chronological order of a man's "journey" through the world—the actions, the words, the recorded thoughts, the places and faces through which he moved: the "life and letters". The second is the creation of a fictional or imaginary relationship between the biographer and his subject; not merely a "point of view" or an "interpretation", but a continuous living dialogue between the two as they move over the same historical ground, the same trail of events. There is between them a ceaseless discussion, a reviewing and questioning of motives and actions and consequences, a steady if subliminal exchange of attitudes, judgments and conclusions. [10]

Holmes's description of a ceaseless discussion, a reviewing and questioning of motives, actions and consequences with his subject as he moves through the physical space they once moved through is very familiar. I, too, do the same with my historical characters. The difference is that the biographer is working with the life of a real person who has already moved through a documented world that once existed—following a journey already made—whereas the fiction author is creating the journey of an imagined character through imagined historical landscapes.

To state it in another way, the historical fiction author funnels their research through the viewpoint and the body of a fictional character in order to create a sense of lived experience. It is what I am calling *informed creative empathy* which I argue is facilitated and deepened by kinesthetic research.

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[10] Holmes, Richard. *Footsteps : Adventures of a Romantic Biographer* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005).

Informed creative empathy is the development of a foundation knowledge of a historical era and/or a protagonist that a writer gains from primary and secondary resources, and is more often than not developed *prior* to visiting the location or engaging in the historical activity. That knowledge is then used by the writer to imagine themselves into the body of the character within the setting that is being created. Or, at least, if the character is not yet developed for such an imagining, then *a* body within the physical and historical space. In other words, the writer is attempting to carry all that background information into that moment of walking the ground, and with it creating a sense of how it would be to exist, embodied, in that historical space and time, thus deepening the creative empathy.

There is a kinship with the Stanislavski method of acting within this idea of preparation for empathy. In his seminal book *Stanislavski and the Actor: The Method of Physical Action*, Jean Benedetti explores Stanislavski's ideas of empathy.

> Human beings have an innate sympathy for one another, the capacity to feel for one another. If I see someone close to me in distress, I feel distress. They cry, I cry. We are crying as separate individuals, but our crying is *similar*. . .It is precisely this capacity to reflect back, to respond to and judge other people's thoughts and feelings that is at the root of art.[11]

Empathy, then, is at the heart of Stanislavski's acting method and crucial to the process of creating empathy in that method is *action*. Benedetti goes on to comment,

> Feelings, emotions, moods, states of mind, Stanislavski realized, arise as a result of that interaction [with the world]. . . . .Experiencing an emotion is not like plugging into an electric socket, pressing the switch so that the emotion comes on, like a light bulb. Emotions are states which are produced by activity, they are the result of process, of actions designed to fulfill an intention.[12]

Here, Benedetti is introducing Stanislavski's belief that the art of acting relies upon a study of behavior in action. That is, the actor must understand how we move and feel in everyday life in order to create a character.

Rhonda Blair, in her paper *Cognitive Neuroscience and Acting Imagination, Conceptual Blending, and Empathy*, strives to understand how neuro- and cognitive sciences could be used to develop acting method, particularly to

[11] Benedetti, Jean. *Stanislavski and the Actor: The Method of Physical Action* (New York: Routledge, 2013).
[12] Ibid.

create character. She finds that across the philosophy and psychology literature that attempts to define empathy, there is agreement on its three basic attributes.

> First, there must be "an affective response to another person, which some believe entails sharing that person's emotional state". . . . . .Second, there must be "cognitive capacity to take the perspective of the other person". . . . . .And, third, there has to be "some monitoring mechanisms that keep track of the origins (self vs other) of the experienced feelings".[13]

Blair's auditing of empathy literature tells us that while we take on the emotional state and perspective of the other person, we retain a sense of self. We do not dissolve into the other, rather boundaries are maintained and there is a mechanism that allows us to remain aware that we are separate and capable of separate action. A position clearly stated by Stanislavski over a century before.

Blair's investigation also brings in the study of neuropsychology and discusses the interesting work of neuropsychiatrist Marco Iacoboni, who, through brain imaging studies suggests that "we come to understand others via imitation, and imitation shares functional mechanisms with language and empathy."[14] His data suggests that imitation shares the same neural mechanisms as language and that empathy occurs via the neural architecture for imitation interacting with regions of the brain governing emotion. Iacoboni goes on to add "our empathic resonance is grounded in the experience of our acting body and the emotions associated with specific movements."[15]

Although Blair is studying empathy in order to develop character through acting technique, these findings could be extended to understand what can be achieved through the kinesthetic approach to research for fiction writers. If our empathic response is, as Iacoboni and Stanislavski suggest, grounded in the action of our bodies and the emotions associated with specific movements, then perhaps visiting the historical site and literally walking the ground is the mechanism that assists in creating an empathic link to time and character. Of course, as the definition of empathy states, the boundaries of self do not dissolve. The writer can never be rid of the fact that she is a twenty-first century woman attempting to engage with

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[13] Lamm et al. 2007 quoted in Rhonda Blair, "Cognitive Neuroscience and Acting: Imagination, Conceptual Blending, and Empathy," *TDR: The Drama Review* 53, no. 4 (Winter, 2009).
[14] Ibid. p 99
[15] Ibid. p 99

the mind of, in my case, an early nineteenth century character. The boundaries of self are still there, but walking in the landscapes where that nineteenth century character would have walked with a studied knowledge of that era, is a step, if you'll forgive the pun, towards greater empathy with that nineteenth mindset.

An example is my visit to Rotten Row, mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. As I walked along the Row, I remembered from my prior study of primary and secondary resources that only minor changes to Rotten Row had occurred between 1812 and 2016, including the type of fencing. I recalled the rules and obligations of the Regency Promenade—a crowded, daily event for the upper class during the London social season—that I had painstakingly researched. I imagined myself into my character—an unmarried, aristocratic woman—and was aware that the freedom of my solo state would not have been acceptable or allowed. A maid would have accompanied me at the very least, but more likely I would have been accompanied by a socially equal chaperone. My vigorous and long twenty-first century stride would have garnered censorious attention, and so I moderated my gait into the shorter and daintier stride length of nineteenth century woman, encumbered by gown skirts and thin leather soles (I had worn both as part of my process and so knew the physical limitations) and the social expectation that a well-bred woman did not move beyond a stroll. All was at an enforced slower pace, much to the irritation of the other twenty-first century pedestrians on the path, and with it came a sense of containment and more time to view the world around me. I noticed more, particularly the way sound travelled, the effect of the light through the trees, and the eye-draw of the riders on the tan. I was for a second, at Promenade and I was reminded that the speed at which we live our modern lives would have been unthinkable to my 1812 character.

My kinesthetic research trip to Rotten Row informed an important scene in my novel, *The Dark Days Club*[16]. The geographical and sensory information I had absorbed during that kinesthetic research visit—the distance between the path and the Row, the way sound travelled, the dappled light, the effect of the crowd—helped me place my 1812 character in not only a more vividly imagined physical space, but also an emotional and social space via informed creative empathy.

Marguerite MacRobert investigates the idea of empathy through fiction in her paper *Exploring an Acting Method to Contain the Potential Madness of the Creative Writing Process.* She proposes that,

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[16] Goodman, Alison. *The Dark Days Club,* A Lady Helen Novel. *(*New York: Viking, 2016).

> The creative writer, in order to make a visceral connection with the reader, has to personally experience as opposed to only imagine or observe what they write, and this can be both exhilarating raison d'etre and a burden for a writer.[17]

Although this idea supports the process of kinesthetic research, I cannot fully agree with MacRobert's assessment. A writer's imagination can, and often does, build that visceral connection with a reader without the need for direct experience. In terms of Kinesthetic research, however, the historical fiction author is, indeed, seeking out a direct experience with the aim of not only creating a more visceral connection with the reader, but also to connect themselves to the historical time in which they are setting their novel.

Acclaimed Australian historical fiction author Kate Forsyth describes her own experience of informed creative empathy in an interview with me conducted for this research.

> I don't go to the landscapes and the historical sites at the beginning of the book. I actually go when I have written most of or finished my first draft. So, I do all my research before I go. I don't go and kind of aimlessly wander around waiting for the inspiration to hit me. I go with purpose. A stated purpose. And I know this feels counter-intuitive, but I can't go until the character is fully inhabited in my imagination. And the place… and I know what I need and what I'm looking for. I'm looking for the details, the telling detail, that will bring my scene to life. I'm looking for the way that landscape and character shape each other in the process.[18]

Forsyth engages in kinesthetic research after her first draft is finished, when period and character are more or less in place, in order to find those details that she feels, can only be found in the historical sites and landscapes of her setting. She is also seeking a sense of how those landscapes would impact her characters.

Award winning historical fiction author, Robyn Cadwallader, comments on going to the historical sites of her novel setting to deepen her first draft.

> What I'm aiming with that, I think, is to fill out what I've already written because at this point the writing is sort of me getting myself moving. So, a first draft. And what I've written, I've thought, yep all of that will need to

[17] MacRobert, Marguerite. "Exploring an Acting Method to Contain the Potential Madness of the Creative Writing Process: Mental Health and Writing with Emotion," *New Writing* 9, no. 3 (2012).
[18] Forsyth, Kate. Interview by Alison Goodman, October 2019.

> be filled out. So, being there, thinking of those scenes, I hope to actually put a bit more texture, a bit more meat on it. [19]

Cadwallader is seeking a way to create what Mantel called in her Reith lecture, "the texture of lived experience", especially the concept of space. For her novel, *The Anchoress*, Cadwallader visited some of the surviving Anchoress holes in England in order to experience the space where her character would spend her life. In one hole attached to a village church, she and her teenage son were asked to stay inside while the vicar performed a baptism, and the vicar actually locked them into the cell. The unplanned experience of being unable to exit proved to be immensely valuable to the novel (while also appalling Cadwallader's son).

> And I sat there thinking, why would you [an Anchoress] do this? Who would it be? Why would you make such a decision? And what would the experience have been like?. . . . . .It got the process moving of if you're in a cell and you can't see out, surely that would heighten all your other senses. If you're just locked in this dark space, you would hear things. . . . . .So, that idea of heightened senses for an anchoress . . . . . .all those things started to move. A lot more developed as I was writing, but this was like the beginning of my sort of entering into it in my imagination.[20]

By being locked in the cell, Cadwallader captured some of the physical details and ramifications of living in such a confined space, but also started the process of imagining the emotional impact of never leaving the cell. Like Forsyth, she is also seeking insight into how the historical sites shape character.

Drawing on these interviews and on my own experience, it becomes clear that these unplanned experiences on-site provide rich detail, particularly in regards to imagining oneself into the emotional space of a setting. Kate Forsyth has also experienced serendipitous events at historical sites that open up new areas within her fiction, and remarks,

> I think that the intense research beforehand prepares the ground and it means that I'm open to those accidental discoveries when they come. Without being prepared, I wouldn't have recognised them when they came.[21]

Imagining herself into the physical and emotional space of her historical setting is immensely important to historical fiction author Pamela Hart who

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[19] Cadwallader, Robyn. Interview by Alison Goodman, October 2019.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Forsyth.

sets her books in the early twentieth century. In her interview with me, she states,

> My approach to writing is very much about embodiment of character and so the kinesthetic research allows me to more easily and more accurately embody my character, and to place them. . . . . .The challenge of writing historical fiction is to recreate a world that the reader did not experience, has never experienced. . . . . .I think it's a short-cut, in many ways. It's a short-cut for the imagination. But it's also an anchor for the imagination. So, when you are imagining a scene, you need to put yourself there in the character's body, in order to write it properly. If you first have to create the environment in your head and then put your character into it, it's more work.[22]

Hart uses kinesthetic research as a short-cut to physically and emotionally place her characters in their historical settings. As Hart comments, the challenge is to recreate a world that the reader has never experienced. It is also a world that the writer has never experienced and the question of whether the historical era is correct is often a concern. For most of the writers I have interviewed, historical authenticity is a goal that can never be reached. As Hart notes, the differences in brain plasticity between a woman who, say lived in 1920, and a contemporary woman are so different that to try and access that would be impossible. The brain and body have been shaped differently by experience and a society with nuances that cannot be researched to the point of stepping into the shoes of that person.[23]

The historical fiction writer is not attempting to create an entirely historically faithful biography of a person who once lived, but characters within a story that has specific events that play out in a particular creative order. Although those events may be historically appropriate, the writer has never been through them in that time or place and so the imagining of their character within that situation must be approximate: as close as they can get via their research, their empathy, and their skill. As Hilary Mantel remarks in her second Reith lecture,

> The past sees and hears differently. It measures differently, counts differently. . . . . .When we imagine a lost world, we must first re-arrange our senses—listen and look, before judging.[24]

For those historical fiction writers who engage in kinesthetic research, it

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[22] Hart, Pamela. Interview by Alison Goodman, October 2019.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Mantel, Hilary. "Reith Lectures: Hilary Mantel: The Iron Maiden," in *Reith Lecture* (www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p055r76d: BBC Radio 4, 2017).

is an essential part of their process that is often carried out when a first draft or other aspects of the project—such as character, setting and/or plot—are in place. Although my investigation is still ongoing, the concept of informed empathy, built from other means of research and the development of the project, is emerging as one of the most important aspects of the methodology. As Mantel says, the past sees and hears differently and kinesthetic research is another way to listen and look. It helps the writer build a sensory, intellectual and emotional bridge between their contemporary lives and the historical lives of their historical characters. It is not precise or even measurably accurate, but for them it is a bridge that takes them closer to a deeper sense of historical authenticity.

CONTRIBUTORS

Rebecca Beattie was lucky enough to grow up on Dartmoor, a remote corner of England, which gave her an early love of nature and a passion for reading books and watching old Hollywood films. Having spent many years in developing a range of creative pursuits, she still takes her inspiration from nature and ancient traditions from around the world.

When she left home to go adventuring, she studied Drama, English Literature and Psychology at degree level, where she learned African Theatre traditions, and discovered that she loved the intrinsic mix of real life and spirituality. In recent years, she studied for an MA in Modern and Contemporary Literature at Birkbeck, University of London, and then enrolled on the Creative Writing PhD at Middlesex University, which was completed in 2020. She is interested in the writer's relationship to their landscape, and the ways in which nature can be a source of inspiration as well as spirituality.

Michelle Braunstein completed her practice-based Ph.D in creative writing at Murdoch University in 2020. She works in learning support with Australian Indigenous students through the Oodgeroo Unit at Queensland University of Technology. After collaborating on an acclaimed play about an insectoid pandemic (BUZZ), Michelle and her former doctoral supervisor, Dr David Moody, are at work again, this time on a screenplay--a psychedelic thriller. Michelle lives in Byron Bay, Australia, with loved ones. Part introvert, part extrovert, she ambivalently waits out Covid-19 isolation.

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include essays in *Children's Literature in Education, Australian Educational Leader* and *Inmaterial.* Geoffrey is currently completing a Doctor of Creative Arts degree at Western Sydney University. His dissertation will include both a work of fiction ("The Phantom Surrealist") and an exegesis exploring representations of Australian and Catalan artists in literature and biography.

Alison Goodman is the author of seven novels including her most recent release The Dark Days Deceit, the final book in her award-winning Lady Helen trilogy, and EON and EONA, a New York Times bestselling fantasy duology that is published in over 20 countries. She was a D. J. O'Hearn Memorial Fellow at Melbourne University and has had her name (and her book) up in lights on an electronic billboard in Times Square. She is currently working on a new Regency series with mid-life protagonists and is undertaking a doctorate at the University of Queensland focusing on the Regency era and historical fiction research.

Rowan Middleton teaches English literature and creative writing at the University of Gloucestershire. He has written articles on teaching crime writing, and the poetry of Edward Thomas and Alice Oswald. His pamphlet *The Stolen Herd* is published by Yew Tree Press.

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Joe Orsmond is an English Teacher at St. Andrew's College, Makhanda, South Africa. He is, given today's world, certain of very little. He loves his family, unconditionally. Surfing makes him happy. Reading makes him a better human being. He writes and teaches because he is compelled to. The last three years of writing (through his Masters in Creative Writing at Rhodes University) has allowed him wonderful moments of introspection, connection and chances to travel. It has opened up new worlds in terms of teaching, for which he is most grateful. It has also reaffirmed his belief in

the importance of writing in creating students and citizens who think deeply and respond meaningfully to all that surrounds them.

Jennifer Quist is a Canadian novelist, critic, teacher, and PhD. candidate in Comparative Literature at the University of Alberta. She is the author of three novels: *Love Letters of the Angels of Death*, *Sistering*, and *The Apocalypse of Morgan Turner* and has been recognized with an Alberta Lieutenant Governor's Emerging Artist Award, and places on the long-lists of the 2015 Dublin International Literary Award and Alberta Readers' Choice Award. Her non-fiction appears in *New Left Review, The Puritan, The Awl*, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, etc.

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