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Creative writing as research, III

This Special issue is dedicated to the late Sandra Burr (PhD), who died as it was in the final production stages. Sandra expressed her excitement at being part of this issue but became ill soon after the call for papers was circulated. The first section of this issue is, therefore, a special tribute to Sandra, her creative work and other contributions to creative writing, and the loss felt around her absence.

Welcome to the third collaborative Special issue of *TEXT* on *Creative writing as research*. The first and second Special Issues on this theme were published in 2010 and 2012. In those landmark collections, 37 creative writing pieces from writers based in universities around Australia and New Zealand were published under refereed circumstances with research statements attached. In line with those earlier issues, this special issue of *TEXT* responds to the current challenge faced by writers in the academy to identify with greater precision how their creative work genuinely contributes to knowledge in both the field of writing and other specified related areas of research. It aims to bring together diverse examples that give an overview of contemporary best practice in creative writing as research, including a set of exemplary research statements, work towards which may assist others in the coming governmental audit of university research quality collection rounds – the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) exercise – and also prompt further investigation and scholarship in this area.

Over the last four years, we have all learned more about how the ERA works, and have deliberated about the consequences of its impact on creative writers in academia. The 2010 collection, *The ERA era: Creative writing as research*, suggested that the way we write creatively as academics was likely to be affected by governmental and institutional imperatives. The 2012 issue, *Creative writing as research II*, proposed that the ERA process was becoming embedded in our work practice, although with:

considerable uncertainty, anxiety, distrust and, perhaps contributing [to] a significant level of confusion, about the ERA (both its goals and processes) among creative writing academics ... [In a survey undertaken for the Special Issue] there was also little agreement regarding how the ERA exercise relates to either the value of creative writing

as a creative art and its products per se, or its effectiveness in the community, the nation or the world (Krauth & Brien 2012b).

In proposing this issue, we were interested in whether this had changed, and if the very idea of ERA is more settled in our minds and work practices. Perhaps creative writing academics understand better what it is they are supposed to be doing for the government that funds them? Perhaps we are embracing more, resisting less ... or, is our practice suggesting that creative academics are seeing their worlds the other way round?

For this issue, we asked our writers to submit a piece that epitomised their writing output as a creative academic under ERA, either currently or in the last two years. In this, we were attempting to indicate and assess, creatively, the influence the ERA policy has had on a series of very different authors' creative work as research. The research aim of *Creative writing as research III* is, therefore, to gauge how much the ERA is affecting us as creative writers, and what possibilities we see that it holds for us in our work.

The 20 new pieces presented herein are all diptychs of previously unpublished creative works plus a maximum 2000 character exegesis in the required form of the ERA research statement. Creative works were submitted in a wide range of genres and include poetry, short stories, creative nonfiction, life writing, ficto-critical work, and a number of genres that cross into professional writing and journalism; such as travel, food and historical writing. A number of these innovative and interesting works feature beautiful illustrations, photographic content or non-standard formatting. The exegetical research statements describe how the creative work makes a distinctive contribution to knowledge that extends the current scholarly and creative literature in the field. They do this by indicating the research significance of the creative piece, by drawing on a sound framework of methodology and scholarship relevant to the work's topic and by following the ERA Submission Guidelines (ARC 2014).

Of the writers invited to contribute to this special issue none declined based on our requirement for a research statement or refused to write the statement. Through the editorial process, it became apparent that some (although not all) celebrated the opportunity to publish their creative work with a research statement as they believe it allows an overt explication of their thematic/technical intentions and respective contexts. These writers see the ERA mandate not as an incursion or a grafted afterthought but an opportunity to open enriched readings of their creative works; an opportunity not otherwise readily available in trade publishing. The research statement, then, need not be merely a supplement but is, instead, complementary to the creative piece. And perhaps publications such as this allow writers to experiment with the research statement as part of the creative work itself – an extension of it, though still operating within the parameters of the ERA Submission Guidelines. As an exegetical document in the hands of creative writers, the research statement might, we therefore suggest, have the scope to become a dialogical method to not only articulate, but also critically engage with, the processes of creative production. Not unlike the exegesis, the statement could be seen as

an opportunity for the distillation and edification of creative practice. We welcome comment on this issue.

As in past issues, contributors also committed to participating in blind referee/reviewer teams, and most contributors acted as referee/reviewer for at least two submissions. This process not only allowed authors to receive targeted, formative feedback from experienced ‘creative work plus research statement’ writers, but for referee/reviewers to reconsider their own work not only in terms of the reviews they received, but also through the lens of the feedback they were providing on other works. Alongside this feedback, this issue has seen the largest editorial team for these Special issues focusing on Creative work as research, along with the input of our new Assistant Editor, Special Issues, Dr Dallas Baker. A number of the editors of this issue are also contributors and their works were independently reviewed by third parties and additional reviewers in order to keep the process completely double blind. As editors, we thank all the reviewers and contributors for their participation in this process, their perceptive and sensitive suggestions for improvement, their editorial eye and their grace under pressure.

Works cited

Australian Research Council (ARC) 2014 *ERA 2015. Excellence in Research for Australia. 2015 Submission Guidelines* Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra

Krauth, Nigel, Jen Webb and Donna Lee Brien 2010 *Creative writing in the ERA era: a new research exercise*, *TEXT* Special issue 7, at <<http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue7/content.htm>> (accessed 1 October 2014)

Krauth, Nigel and Donna Lee Brien 2012 *TEXT* Special issue 15, at <<http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue15/content.htm>> (accessed 1 October 2014)

Krauth, Nigel and Donna Lee Brien 2012b ‘Creative writing under the ERA: writing under duress, but relatively happy’ *TEXT* Special issue 15, at <<http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue15/content.htm>> (accessed 1 October 2014)