

Writing in Education

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR WRITERS IN EDUCATION

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Photo on cover and Page 3 from Pixabay.

Interested in contributing?

We invite NAWE members to write on the subject of creative writing in education - in schools, adult education and community settings. We encourage you to think broadly on this topic and address any issue relating to the development of a space for creative writing in the education system. Please note, it is developmental work that we wish to highlight, not self-promotion. It may be useful to think about the kinds of articles most useful to your teaching and practice.

Submission deadlines:

Autumn 2023: early August (published September)

Winter 2023: end November (published January)

Spring 2024 (Conference Edition): early April (published May)

For submission guidelines please refer to:

www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/nawe-magazine/submissions.html

Writing in Education Team:

Editor: Lisa Koning, publications@nawe.co.uk

Reviews: Matthew Tett, reviews@nawe.co.uk

Advertisement Enquiries: publications@nawe.co.uk

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Whole page: 7.25" (w) x 9" (h) £300

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Writing in Education is the members magazine for the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE)

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Welcome

A word from the Editor

Hi Everyone

Welcome to our Spring 2023 edition. It's a packed volume this time around with articles about our recent conference including contributions that have stemmed from some of the conference sessions, and then more!

You might be wondering about the birds on the cover and on this page - when I select an image for each edition, I like to make it relevant to the content. But that's not so easy when it's an online conference. Which got me thinking about why our members attend the conference and the value it brings. Thought-provoking and relevant content is, of course, an important factor but then I'm sure our attendees value those opportunities to meet with others. Regardless of whether a conference is in person or online, conferences bring people together, provide opportunities to chat with others, and meet with people who share our passions as well as our challenges. And two little birds having a chat by a water fountain seemed to capture that. I hope the recent NAWE conference provided you such an opportunity.

One again, a huge thank you to our contributors. This publication, our Conference Issue, contains articles that have resulted from some of the sessions. Marnie Forbes Eldridge has written a reflection on the conference. Ruth Moore reflects on her session co-presented with Sarah Stretton where they consider the question whether to embark on PhD studies. Erica Masserano and Sam Dodd have shared an interesting article on using Creative Practice as Community Education. In addition, we have a variety of articles covering a diverse range of subjects. Thank you to Celia Brayfield for her contribution on remembering Fay Weldon. I very much enjoyed reading of Brad Gyori and James Pope's experience of using digital interactive storytelling on a project with marginalised young people. There are too many articles for me to mention them all in - but I do hope you'll find something to inspire your own writing and teaching.

Happy writing everyone, keep your ideas and articles coming.

Best wishes, *Lisa*

publications@nawe.co.uk

Guidance on submitting to Writing in Education can be found on the NAWE website:
<https://www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/nawe-magazine/submissions.html>

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NAWE NEWS

Acting Co Chair's Report



The final period of our 2022/23 financial year proved to be a particularly challenging time, and many of you will be aware that there have been some changes for NAWE. Our strategy from 2020 onwards had been to develop a programme of work and a profile that might lead to regular funding, for instance from Arts Council England.

The success in applying for various forms of emergency funding from Arts Council England during the pandemic year augured well. However, during the early part of the 2022/23 financial year we were unsuccessful with an Arts Council England Project Grant Application and with our application for regular funding from Arts Council England.



In January it became apparent that the cost of pursuing this strategy, alongside spending on other aspects of our work, had created a financial problem. While expenditure had slightly exceeded that budgeted for, income was considerably below, largely due to the failure to generate grant income.

Our then Chair voluntarily stood down and resigned from the Board of Trustees. The remaining Trustees asked if Derek Neale and I would jointly taking on the role of Acting Co-Chairs. Along with our fellow Trustees, Derek and I began to explore options and it became clear that some cost cutting would be required for NAWE to continue to provide its core service to members.

A full budget review was undertaken and a programme of savings put in place. These have included, for instance, NAWE's magazines migrating to an online only platform (although print on demand is now a possibility), and the newsletter becoming fortnightly. NAWE's Director agreed to take voluntary redundancy, leaving shortly after the Conference, and Mosaic Events, who provide Membership Management Services, postponed a planned increase in their costs.

The Trustees have taken on direct responsibility for some aspects of NAWE's work. This includes financial and personnel management, liaising with partners and future planning. Four months after the financial issues had come to light, NAWE's finances are now stable. After a very successful conference with increased attendance, we are now building modest reserves ready to cover future expenditure. Membership levels have remained healthy.

For the immediate future we will concentrate on maintaining the core offer to members. Where we can generate income by doing work appropriate to this core offer, we will do so. We will be creating more opportunities for members to meet each other and to let us know what they want from NAWE, either directly or through the Higher Education and Community Writing Sub-Committees.

While none of the Trustees would have wished for these changes to have come so quickly, we now have a much clearer sense of what needs to be done. We have, in many ways, reverted back to the membership organisation we always were, concerned to support individual writers and organisations working across our sector.

*Jonathan Davidson, Acting Co-Chair, jointly on behalf of Derek Neale (Acting Co-Chair)
& the NAWE Board of Trustees*

NAWE NEWS

HE Committee Chair's Column

The new HE Committee met in April and worked to outline the plans for the next year. Elena Traina, a PhD student on the committee, has volunteered to try to revitalise the PhD network. We are exploring running a series of regional events to be hosted around the country at various universities.

Derek Neale is on the advisory committee for the British Academy's Deep Dive report on English Studies. Two members, Celia Brayfield and Jennifer Young, are on the current working group for the new QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Creative Writing, including. The new benchmark statement format includes sections on accessibility, equality diversity and inclusivity, enterprise and entrepreneurship and education for sustainable development. The sections are coming along well, and it should be a positive next step in creative writing guidance.

We'd also like to celebrate and recognise the contributions of Helena Blakemore, a long serving member of the HE Committee. She is retiring in June, and she'll be leaving the committee. We are very grateful for all her hard work!

Advice on lodging doctorates and embargos

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

NAWE Creative Writing Research Benchmark 2018

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

QAA Creative Writing Subject Benchmark Statement, 2019

https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/subject-benchmark-statements/subject-benchmark-statement-creative-writing.pdf?sfvrsn=2fe2cb81_4

NAWE guidance on short-term academic contracts

<https://www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/writing-at-university/contracts.html>

OU/NAWE events (audio recorded) on Creative Writing and the REF and Creative Writing PhDs

<http://www.open.ac.uk/arts/research/contemporary-cultures-of-writing/events/contemporary-cultures-writing-seminars-spring-2018>

Writing in Practice - submissions

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

Jennifer Young

HE Committee Chair, NAWÉ

Writing In Education
THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR WRITING IN EDUCATION

CREATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS
Please see Editor Helen Traina (2018) helen@nawe.co.uk

ARTICLES & FEATURES
Editorial enquiries and articles should be sent to editorial@nawe.co.uk

ASSOCIATION NEWS
Updates, notices and general enquiries should be sent to general@nawe.co.uk

CONFERENCES & REFLECTIONS
Please see reflections@nawe.co.uk for details of our annual conference and other events

CONTRIBUTORIAL ARTICLES
What You Need to Know: A guide to the format and style of articles for publication in the journal. See www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education

WHAT YOU HAD TO SAY
Reactions from the social media community on www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education

GOT SOMETHING TO SAY?

Dear Editor

Email publications@nawe.co.uk

NAWE NEWS

Writing in Practice Principal Editors' Column



Kate North, Principal Editor writes

I am writing this on the way to Madrid for the European Association of Writing Programmes' bi-annual conference at Casa Árabe with Escuela de Escritores. I am looking forward to the selection of theoretical, creative, and pedagogical presentations and discussions on the programme. I am also excited to meet up with colleagues I've not seen for a while and to no doubt making new acquaintances. I always come away from trips such as this imbued with a new sense of what is possible. I experience a reassurance that the small corner of the academy in which I am situated, in the UK, is in fact connected to a much broader eco-system of creators and thinkers. It is strange to travel to an unfamiliar place (it's my first time in Madrid) yet, to be looking forward to a form of homecoming. It's a kind of opposite to hiraeth, the Welsh concept of longing for a past that no longer exists. It's finding that home is in more than one place, home is both a fixed domestic location and a pop-up space created for the likeminded to journey to. For five days I will be home-away-from-home and I can't wait.



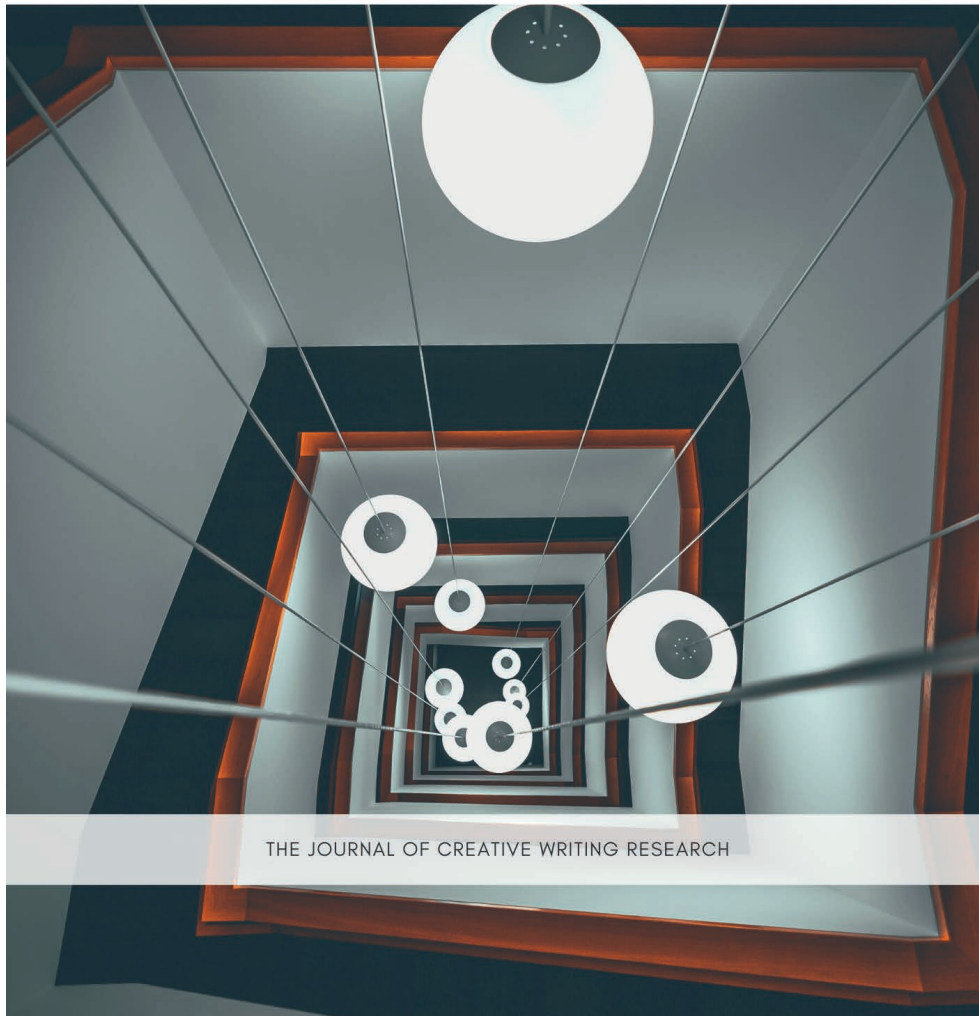
Francis Gilbert, co-editor, writes:

'As I write this on 3th May 2023, I've just returned from an Ecstatic Dance retreat held in the Osho Leela Personal Development Centre in Gillingham, Dorset. I have found that doing Ecstatic Dance has been embarrassing, liberating and ultimately helped my writing in strange and unexpected ways.

Ecstatic Dance is a form of guided 'free movement' to music, which involves listening deeply to the music, grounding yourself in your body and then moving in the way you want to move. In our society, with its cultural and religious legacies of shame around our bodies, we are heavily policed both by external and internal voices about how we should move. Ecstatic Dance is a way of releasing yourself from these destructive cycles. The Wikipedia page on it is a useful starting point: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecstatic_dance

Anyway, most importantly for NAWA members, I found that I was journaling and writing loads during the retreat, and also reading. The combination of movement, meditation (which was also part of the retreat) and reflection in groups really helped me find my creative juices again. Let's see how this mood lasts now I'm back at work!

writing in practice



THE JOURNAL OF CREATIVE WRITING RESEARCH

Writing in Practice

Volume 9 - A call will go out in late Spring, to be published in Winter 2023

We are looking for academically rigorous research into creative writing, appropriately referenced and engagingly written. We are happy to receive articles that reflect on practice and process, explore writing research in interdisciplinary contexts, engage in critical analysis of writing pedagogy, explore cultural and global challenges such as diversity and inclusion and ecological sustainability through creative writing.

Creative Writing itself is welcomed when integral to an article. Submissions should be 4-10,000 words long and include an abstract of up to 200 words. All submissions will be anonymously peer reviewed. See the contributor guidelines to submit your work via the submissions link: www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/writing-at-university/writing-in-practice.html

If you are interested in acting as peer reviewer for the journal, please send details of your expertise to the editorial board, c/o: admin@nawe.co.uk Writing in Practice is an open access, online journal that complements Writing in Education, the NAWE magazine distributed to its members. As the UK Subject Association for Creative Writing, NAWE aims to further knowledge, understanding and support research, teaching and learning in the subject at all levels.

NAWE NEWS

AWP Report (US)



Happy Spring, NAWE readers! The Association of Writers & Writing Programs (AWP) has been hard at work on multiple pursuits this year. First, we are excited to have launched the AWP HBCU (Historically Black Colleges & Universities) Fellowship Program at the 2023 AWP Conference & Bookfair this past March in Seattle, Washington. [This initiative](#) provided funding for two HBCU faculty fellows and four HBCU student fellows to attend the 2023 conference and learn from program advisor, author, and HBCU professor A.J. Verdelle, who authored a memoir on her decades-long friendship with Toni Morrison. Verdelle shared her insight and wisdom at the conference on recognizing and nurturing Black genius. AWP will continue this newly established program for #AWP24; [fellowship applications](#) for students and faculty will be open June 1–July 31, 2023.

AWP also launched the [James Alan McPherson Endowment](#) and renamed its Prize for the Novel in his honor at #AWP23. James Alan McPherson was the first African American to win a Pulitzer Prize for fiction for his short story collection *Elbow Room*. McPherson was a faculty member at the esteemed Iowa Writers' Workshop and, over several decades, nurtured many literary careers as a teacher, mentor, and friend. McPherson is an excellent choice to represent AWP's commitment to innovation and excellence in writing and diversity and respect for writers who teach. The James Alan McPherson Endowment will support the annual \$5,500 cash prize for the novel to an emerging writer. It will also honor the many contributions and enduring legacy of James Alan McPherson to the field of creative writing.

Last, it's full steam ahead to the 2024 AWP Conference & Bookfair in Kansas City, Missouri. In light of the tumultuous political atmosphere in Missouri, [AWP affirms its support of LGBTQIA+ authors](#) and has created a plan to ensure the safety of all attendees. AWP looks forward to highlighting LGBTQIA+ voices at this upcoming conference. Accepted conference events will be announced in August, and registration will open for #AWP24. AWP will continue to offer a virtual option for those unable to travel to Kansas City.

We hope to see you in person or virtually on February 7–10, 2024!

Juanita Lester
Director of Communications & Technology

NAWE NEWS

AAWP Report (Australasia)



By Julia Prendergast and Jen Webb.

Dear NAWE readers.

We are grateful for the opportunity to provide an update about the Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP), the peak academic body representing creative writing and research in Australasia. In particular, we are delighted to share news about our annual national conference. Let us begin by introducing ourselves: we are Associate Professor Julia Prendergast (AAWP President | Chair) and Distinguished Professor Jen Webb (Convenor of the 2023 annual conference).

This year, we celebrate the AAWP's 28th annual gathering: <https://aawp.org.au/28th-annual-conference/>. The theme of the conference is 'We need to talk'. The conference is hosted by the University of Canberra's Centre for Creative and Cultural Research and will take place between Wednesday 29 November and Friday 1 December 2023. The event will be held on Ngunnawal Country; we acknowledge with gratitude that we have been welcomed to walk on this unceded land, and pay our respects to their elders, past and present, and emerging. We invite proposals for conference papers, panels, or performances that focus on issues that demand personal, social and institutional attention; and we are particularly interested in proposals that are collaborative, dialogic, improvisational, and/or performative.

In 2023, AAWP aims to situate traditional practices, pedagogies and conceptions at the heart of the annual conference. The conference program facilitates engagement with and reflection upon the theme 'We need to talk', as it relates to creative writing and research. We consider the intersection between marginalised and mainstream voices, and the modes of discourse and dialogue applied in such instances of making and thinking. The program will include three full days of engagement featuring keynote and plenary sessions, presentations, exhibition elements, workshops, readings, and panel discussions.

Please consider the following list of starter-topic areas as you construct your abstract/proposal:

Orality – e.g. Spoken word forms; Writing/improvising for performance; Song / chant; Script/screenplay; Audio and transdisciplinary storytelling modes; Yarning Circles; Podcasts

Poetry – e.g. Performance poetry; Transformative practice; Collaborative work; Eco-poetry; Poetry of resistance

Essay – e.g. Intimacy; Lyrical or dialogic essay; Writing as conversation, or collaboration; Reading as intimacy; Manifesto / diatribe / rant

Sustainability – e.g. The environment and living in the more-than-human world; Traditional ways of knowing, being and storying; Economic and political engagement in writing/by writers; Object writing; Alternate knowledge systems; Umwelt

Queering Writing – e.g. Decentred and diverse voices; Indigenous stories; Neglected art forms; Queering forms; AI / Chat GPT – implications, limitations, possibilities; Gatekeeping

Arts/Health – e.g. Writing, reading, and wellbeing; Transdisciplinary practice for health; Creative interventions and trauma; Working beyond the academy (outreach, communicating research); Silences in academia; Care for the author.

NAWE NEWS

The AAWP annual conference is our most important national forum for discussing the practices and pedagogies, as well as current and nascent debates, at the nexus of creative writing and research. Approximately 150 people attend the conference each year, including the most prominent researchers in the field, commercially successful and highly acclaimed authors and poets, as well as emerging practitioners, and the academy's wonderful Creative Writing research students. It is designed for creators, researchers, teachers and publishers of creative writing, who operate within and across the blurred lines of local, regional and national territories. We aim to build cultural capital and community capacity, and facilitate meaningful community engagement, while increasing our universities' value and standing within our respective communities. You will find articles developed from many members of the AAWP community in *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, Australia's leading journal of creative writing research: <https://textjournal.scholasticahq.com/>

While the conference is held in person, there will also be a virtual stream for those who can't make it to Canberra or Australia. We are delighted to continue our partnership with NAWE by welcoming a number of NAWE members as virtual guests to the AAWP conference. We hope to continue this gesture of reciprocity in the future. We do hope you are able to join us for our annual conference, and look forward to welcoming our NAWE friends, in person or on screens, and to sharing published outcomes after the conference.

REMINDER:

The AAWP suite of prizes is open and closes at the end of June:

<https://aawp.org.au/news/opportunities/>

Julia Prendergast

Julia lives in Melbourne, Australia, on unceded Wurundjeri land. Her novel, *The Earth Does Not Get Fat* (2018) was longlisted for the Indie Book Awards (debut fiction). Her short story collection: *Bloodrust and other stories* was published in 2022. Julia is a practice-led researcher—an enthusiastic supporter of transdisciplinary, collaborative research practices, with a particular interest in neuro | psychoanalytic approaches to writing and creativity. Julia is President | Chair of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP), the peak academic body representing the discipline of Creative Writing (Australasia). She is Associate Professor and Discipline Leader (Creative Writing and Publishing) at Swinburne University, Melbourne.

Jen Webb

Jen lives in Canberra, Australia, on unceded Ngunnawal country. Dean of Graduate Research and Distinguished Professor of Creative Practice at the University of Canberra, Jen has writing extensively about writing and other creative acts. Her book *Researching Creative Writing* (2015) is widely cited in the field, and her most recent scholarly volume, *Gender and the Creative Labour Market* (2022), provides insights into how to prepare creative graduates for their careers. She is co-editor of the literary journal *Meniscus* and the scholarly journal *Axon: Creative Explorations*, and her recent poetry collections include *Moving Targets* (2018) and *Flight Mode* (2020).

NAWE NEWS

Lapidus

Remembering the body in the rush

Rushing to meet overdue deadlines whilst remonstrating with myself for tardiness, procrastination, over committing, saying yes, a bit too often I did my usual of heading towards my targets by any possible means. This included late nights, early mornings, ignoring prompts of hunger, rest, social and family connection replacing them with sugar spiking 'bad food' snacks, furrowed brow, and narrow focussed blinkers I raced to the finish, promising myself that at the end I would immediately write a reflective journal piece.

Knowledge of the physiology of anxiety and its impact was dismissed. My focus was the end point; a date and time I negotiated with my body when I could reasonably and properly exhale. At this finish point I visualised my reward; being able to relax free of care, basking in the satisfaction of 'job done,' re-connecting with my body and positive relating.

So, here I am, on a train, at the end of the intensity of effort; on the other side; and what do I feel?... Numb and shocked, out of my body altogether. The longed-for exultant phase, celebratory fist in the air feeling I dreamt about is elusive. Its surreal and unreal. I feel unravelled, spooled out and in the transition between exhaustion and shock I ask silently – Is this it? I can't even describe what I expect or expected. Now I understand why athletes who run a lap of honour, receiving accolades, down-regulating, and landing in reality which says: 'Yes... you really have done it. You have come to the end.

I recognise that endings like this one are familiar- a damp squib soggy dumplin' kind of thing. If it were a train station, I would miss my stop, not hear an announcement that I had reached my destination. I am, instead still in a separate world, one in which nothing else mattered unless it serviced my needs and purpose. Out of touch with what is happening internally and dimly aware of sounds and smells going on outside, trying to return to reality I hear a snatch of conversation:

"It's so sh*t living in the countryside. Yeah, its ok having nine bedrooms (we're a mix of families) but what's the point? Dad sold the house when they got divorced... I need to charge my social batteries."

I try to fathom the context, meanings, and tone, try to match it to the voice coming from two seats away as the passenger's voice and words trail off as they leave at the next stop.

Ending this way after such a rush means coming back to my body is a revelation. Oh I have arms, legs.... I breathe, I have a headache. The voice inside me says... this was not a good experience and scolds me not to do this again. Writing for wellbeing in this way gives me an opportunity to process my experiences and notice my inner goings on and their effects. Listening to myself as I tune back in with relief, I urgently remind myself of how much better, freer, and creative I feel now, coming out from the dark, exhausted near-collapse place into the light; how this place of light is worthy of nurturing and extending in preference to the other.

Latest news at Lapidus International?

Monthly events

Check out what we are up to and what events are happening via the Lapidus website.

Creative Bridges 2023

We are thrilled to announce the return of Creative Bridges, our flagship online conference on September 16th- 17th 2023. Over this weekend, we will be showcasing relevant international research and practice in the rapidly growing field of writing for wellbeing.

NAWE NEWS

If you have an interest in writing for wellbeing, or creative writing for therapeutic purposes, then this is something you will want to be part of. Do you use words to support positive mental health? Do you use words to explore professional and personal development? Do you use words/writing to explore social issues/social action? Are you interested in learning more, and perhaps including writing for wellbeing in your personal or professional life? Then this conference is for you!

Keep an eye out for the call for papers, which launches soon, on the conference website: www.creativebridges.site

Lapidus Board Member callout

Would you be interested in helping to shape the future of Lapidus International and the field of writing for wellbeing? Do you want to help promote the values of Lapidus and support our goal to build a community of writing for wellbeing facilitators and researchers? Then why not join the Lapidus board as a voluntary board member?

Lapidus International is an expressive arts organisation that believes in the power of words, both spoken and written, to provide benefits to wellbeing and professional development. The organisation supports its members internationally by giving them opportunities to connect, develop and share in the Lapidus community.

If this sounds like something you would be interested in, please send a CV and short covering letter explaining why you would like to join the board to chair@lapidus.org.uk. We look forward to hearing from you.

Val Watson (Chair) and Richard Axtell- Lapidus Internationa



NAWE is the only UK wide organization supporting the development of creative writing of all genres and in all educational and community settings.

As a membership organization, we aim to put creativity at the heart of education. Our members include writers, teachers, students, academics, literature professionals, librarians and laureates.

Career support, networks, publications, resources, events & services for those teaching or studying Creative Writing

To support their work, members receive:

- 3 editions of our magazine, Writing in Education, showcasing the very best in creative writing and teaching practice
- The Writer's Compass, a weekly e-bulletin including latest jobs, opportunities and events
- Invitations to regional gatherings and the NAWE Conference, the essential UK event for all those involved in the teaching of writing
- Public liability insurance, processing of Enhanced Disclosures with the DBS
- Career development advice and resources
- The option to join our Professional Directory, for use by any prospective employers

Join us! We're here to support you

Contact Us

www.nawe.co.uk/membership.html
admin@nawe.co.uk
0330 3335 909

nawe | national association of
writers in education

Are you getting the most from your NAWE Membership?

You'll know, of course, about all our advocacy work for Creative Writing, and, at the individual level, how we provide public liability insurance cover if you're a professional member, but are you aware of all the other ways we can support you and your work?

For instance, we can help to spread the word about any workshops or competitions you're running (or any jobs you're recruiting for if you're an organisation) through our weekly e-bulletin *The Writer's Compass* and our website listings. We give priority to including member listings. All we ask is that it has a professional development element. You can find submissions guidance at:

<https://www.nawe.co.uk/the-writers-compass/contact-us.html>

We also try, if space permits, to give a mention to any special news you may have of interest to members that falls outside our listing categories within the feature part of the bulletin. Our Information Manager Philippa Johnston pjohnston@nawe.co.uk is the person to contact about anything relating to the bulletin or website. She's also very happy to share member news via social media.

We're always very keen to hear about your news and successes and we can share these through the Member News section in our magazine *Writing in Education*. Publications Manager, Lisa Koning (publications@nawe.co.uk) will be delighted to hear from you. Or perhaps you have a book that you would like considered for review in the magazine. Do contact our Reviews Manager, Matthew Tett (reviews@nawe.co.uk) if you have a new book coming out that you think would be of interest to your fellow members. You'll find details of submission windows at:

<https://www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/nawe-magazine/submissions.html>

Finally, we have a Professional Directory on the website which lists professional members who are available for projects, author visits and other events. This acts as a valuable resource for organisations looking to work with a creative writer so it's worth revisiting your entry every now and again to check that it's up to date. You can manage your entry at

<https://www.nawe.co.uk/membership/manage.html>

If you have any problems doing this, our Membership Co-ordinator Sophie Flood will be happy to help. Contact her on 0330 3335 909 / admin@nawe.co.uk

We look forward to hearing from you! '

Members' News

Morvern's new publication

As of 17 May 2023, publication of the book written by NAWE member, Anna Morvern, entitled, *Untold Intelligence. Writing on Trauma and Mystical Relationship from the Notebooks of Anna Morvern*, news of which was shared by NAWE on social media, is not going ahead on 28 May 2023 as scheduled. Anna notes that legal issues that have arisen first need to be resolved.

In lieu of the anticipated book launch, Anna will be sharing a short video about her writing and the writing process on her YouTube channel, @UntoldIntell, on 28 May 2023. Later available on the website: www.untoldintelligence.ie

Manuscript excerpt

How can we listen to holes, how can we see them? William Blake had seen a tree full of angels, and the story goes that he only escaped a beating by his father for telling this "lie" because of his mother's intervention. Sergei Pankejeff, Freud's famous "Wolf Man", who had seen terrible things, saw a tree, but inhabited by the wolves of his childhood. I have just tried to know that the tree was there, outside myself, but nonetheless within sight and touch. Besides seeing, for sure, that angels and much worse than angels were also there, *evil beasts*, in the holes.

Kickstart your creativity



Mslexia is the no.1 magazine for women who write

Read by top authors and absolute beginners, Mslexia is a masterclass in the business and psychology of writing. Our readers go on to sign six-figure book deals, win major literary prizes and tour the world talking about their work. Are you ready to join them?

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Winchester Poetry Prize 2023 opens for entries

Winchester Poetry Festival opens the ever-popular Winchester Poetry Prize for submissions.

Winchester Poetry Festival is calling on poets from around the world to submit their best, unpublished work to be in with a chance of winning £1000. Poems can be on any subject and in any form or style but must be written in English and be no more than 40 lines. This year, we are pleased to announce that our 2023 Winchester Poetry Prize judge, is multi-award winning poet and author, [Zaffar Kunial](#).

Winchester Poetry Prize offers prizes for poems judged as being the top three, with a special prize for the best poem by a poet living in Hampshire. The Winchester Poetry Prize is one of the few literary competitions where the winners are announced live at the Award Ceremony with no knowledge of their placing in advance. Additionally, Winchester Poetry Festival also publishes all winning and commended poems in a competition anthology which is also launched at the live ceremony.

This exciting prize-giving event will take place in front of a live audience at The ARC, Winchester, as part of the Winchester Poetry Festival programme 13-15 Oct 2023.

Zaffar Kunial says:

"I'm really looking forward to reading your poems, and whatever their subject and whatever their style. Good luck!"

Chair of Winchester Poetry Festival, Jane Bryant, says:

"The Winchester Poetry Prize has grown in popularity since its inception in 2016. It acts as a creative catalyst for some tremendous poets and writers locally, nationally, and internationally. We welcome entries from all writers. Last year we were delighted to receive poems from over 2000 people from more than 35 countries. What a fabulous indication of the value of poetry in people's professional and personal lives."

Managing Partner at Paris Smith (lead sponsor), Huw Miles says:

"We are honoured to continue our support of the Winchester Poetry Prize, an inspiring and significant platform celebrating the power of words and the vital role poetry plays in our society. As a firm that values creativity, innovation and diversity, we believe the arts - and poetry, in particular - possess the unique ability to capture emotions, challenge perspectives and foster connections between people. The Winchester Poetry Prize is a fantastic opportunity for both established and emerging poets to showcase their talent. We are thrilled to be part of this journey in nurturing the literary arts. Our partnership with this esteemed competition reaffirms our commitment to supporting the creative community and helping to amplify the voices of these gifted writers, whose works enrich our world in so many ways."

Winchester Poetry Prize is an annual competition that attracts writers of all abilities from all over the world. Entry is £6 for the first poem, and £5 for subsequent poems. There is a pay-it-forward scheme originally set up by 2020's competition winner, Lewis Buxton. This enables those who can afford to enter the competition to support emerging poets who cannot. Details of how you can contribute to, or benefit from, this scheme can be found here: www.winchesterpoetryfestival.org/prize

The competition closes at 23:59 on 31 July 2023. Poems can be submitted by email or by post.

Further details, including guidelines and how to enter can be found on the website: www.winchesterpoetryfestival.org/prize



Reflections on the 2023 NAWE Conference

by Marnie Forbes Eldridge

The conference offered me a chance to delve into other people's practice, be stimulated, inspired, and take stock of my own work. When it came to my session **Creating community narratives through exploring individual and collective stories** on the Saturday I was shattered! I had been exposed to a multitude of ideas and examples of good work, and I had so many thoughts racing through my mind on Living as a Writer.

I came to the conference wanting to share what I do and how I balance it, using two projects, one creating a community play at Stonehenge and the other the intergenerational work I do at Corsham's StoryTown. I don't know if this came across, those in my session seemed to enjoy it, hopefully they were able to use the prompts for their own work and take away some ideas. We didn't complete the exercises planned, but I had prepared a sheet with all the

activities that they could use or look at in their own time, including the ones we covered and the ones we didn't have time for. What I did manage to explore was the importance of creativity in the classroom, exposing young people to artists, active learning and the importance of creativity, the arts and story for communities. I facilitate others work, whilst creating my own and this has always been a juggling act; give too much energy to others and sometimes you are left drained, but through reflection and organisation you can be inspired for your own work.

The feedback I received was positive and there were questions that were sent to me about how I get funded to do the work I do. Both projects were enabled through grants, they were aided through external money from organisations who see the importance of the Arts for all. Neither project would have happened if this 'extra' funding hadn't been found. This was something that I noted from other sessions too. The conference brought into stark realisation that the Arts are suffering, English Departments in Universities are making redundancies and in turn research, projects and early involvement with the creative subjects are being diminished. Perhaps this has always been the way? The Arts get slashed in curriculums and we must push to keep their profile and connections alive. The conference left me with a need and a desire to continue my work, to aim to get funding for more projects and to better log and record what I do.

The multiple sessions at this year's conference supported the notion that writing, creativity and the Arts are good for wellbeing and that sharing practice aids creatives in their own work and the facilitation of others. I know that I need to grow my work in the communities I live and work in, support education establishments with their artistic journeys and that keeping story at the centre of what I do will inspire my own writing, and it was good to share this. Keeping the balancing act of family and work is always hard but crucial, and I intend to develop my projects within these communities, exploring them

further and allowing the collective stories to continue to speak. The landscapes we are brought up in shape us. What we encounter evolves and connects to our writing and creativity, this was the case in the Stonehenge 'Rock at the Rocks' project and has been and is still in Corsham's StoryTown.

Whether we walk the landscape, listen to the tales that have occurred before us or to those that run through us, living as a writer means capturing and exploring what we encounter, and this conference was a wonderful example of that. I am preparing and starting a new project at William Morris' Kelmscott Manor, where he and other artists, including his daughter May used the Oxfordshire landscape and the inspirational place to stimulate and create Art, story and socialist ideals. I will take what this conference has given me and mix these ideas with Morris' way of living as a writer. It will develop my practice and I will explore more individual and collective stories in what we create with the narrative of this different landscape.



Marnie is a writer, storyteller and theatre practitioner. She specialises in writing for and with young people, myth, landscape and history. She has worked for the RSC and Salisbury Playhouse, taught from Primary to Postgraduate, trained teachers in using creativity in all of the curriculum, freelance Associate Artist of Prime Theatre, Writer Producer for Paper Nations and has been supported by ACE www.marnieforbeseldridge.com.

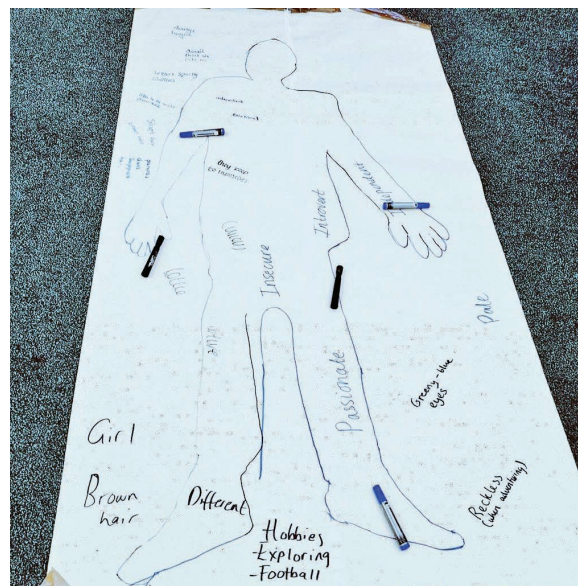


Creative Writing, Educational Practice and Academic Research: An Alchemical Experiment

by Daniel Ingram-Brown

I had the pleasure of chairing two sessions at this year's NAWE conference. At the first, Coventry's poet laureate, Emily Lauren Jones, discussed how to make teaching poetry less scary. Deanna Rodger spoke at the second, leading us through a process of reflection on our creative facilitation practice. I also enjoyed sharing my own creative practice in a session chaired by Seraphima Kennedy, who introduced me and guided the Q&A with enthusiasm and insight. As a creative practitioner who weaves various elements: writing, drama, educational practice and, currently, academic research as a doctoral student, I wanted to talk about how these different elements combined in creative and productive ways.

For my session, I chose the title, *Bea's Witch: An alchemical experiment in creative writing, educational practice and academic research*. What image does the word alchemist conjure for you? I picture someone in a darkened room, fierce-eyed, sweating over a labyrinth of tubes and crucibles, the flame beneath a copper pan casting flickering shadows onto a low timbered ceiling, a dark substance in the basin bubbling, moving and melting – transforming.



In her feminist revision of the psychoanalyst Carl Jung, Susan Rowland (2002) points to Jung's study of alchemy as being of interest in postmodern times. Those early proto scientists believed in the "continuation between what was material, what was psychological and what was sacred" (p131), between the inner and the outer world. They believed their experiments to be transformative, both inwardly, transforming the soul, and outwardly, transforming matter. They lived in a world that had not yet imbibed that dualism of modernity. For them, the physical and the psychic world were interwoven, inseparable, each influencing and affecting the other. I find this an interesting metaphor for creative writing, in which we transform our experience and inner world into an object, into a text, mixing all sorts of elements in our writer's cauldrons to create our potions, following our quest for gold. (I could have used the metaphor of the witch's cauldron as much as the alchemist's alembic). I have also found the picture of the alchemist useful when thinking about my creative practice, which blends writing, education, performance and academic study, bringing them together in a way that is transformative for me and, hopefully, for readers, audiences, participants and students too.

In the session, I talked about my creative journey, following its different threads to explore how they wove to shape my current research.

My early career was as a director and writer for independent theatre companies, producing journey-based performance, large-scale community productions and small-scale touring productions to non-theatre spaces.

I spoke about how my educational practice was strengthened through being a *First Story* writer-in-residence and sharpened through an MA in Creative Writing and Drama in Education at Leeds Beckett University.

The shape of my career shifted as I became an adoptive father – being a parent is less compatible with months

on tour. I turned my focus to writing novels, and over the following years had a trilogy of middle grade fantasy adventure books published: *The Firebird Chronicles*.

When I began my part-time PhD in 2018, these different ingredients naturally infused my research. The resulting project is made of three elements: a young adult novel, two secondary school residencies and a thesis reflecting on that creative and educational process.

The first element, my initial creative practice, was writing a young adult novel. The story tells of an adopted protagonist who encounters the ghost of England's most famous prophetess, Mother Shipton. Through this encounter, the girl, Beatrice, takes agency over her own story, coming to terms with aspects of her past and taking hold of her future. The novel, *Bea's Witch: a ghostly coming-of-age story*, was published in 2021. Throughout the writing process, I kept a reflective journal that documented the way in which I constructed the novel, for instance how I drew on personal experience, followed instincts, used archetypal structures, responded to feedback from readers, or made adjustments arising from theoretical challenges or insights. As part of the writing process, I also fabricated a collection of objects – a backpack belonging to my main character, containing, among other things, her diary, a letter from her birth mother, a worksheet given to her by her social worker, a broken cat's collar, a birthday card from her adoptive mother and her teddy, Turtle. These objects, as well as the many edits of the manuscript, became data for my research.

The second element in my research was undertaking two writing residencies at schools in West Yorkshire, working with two groups of self-selecting students from Years 7-9. I used the novel as a structure to underpin and shape the residencies, facilitating a series of workshops that responded to the themes of the novel, for instance, home, family, belonging, identity, displacement, ghosts and memory, loss and hope. At the end of the residencies, the students' work was published in two anthologies – *You Are Not Alone: The Diary of the Girl in the Shadows* and *Lost*

In my conference session, I focused on one of the workshops from the residencies. In it, I used objects as a prompt, drawing on my own experience of using objects in the construction of *Bea's Witch*. The students were asked to draw an object from their own home. As a group, we then gathered around a bedroom marked out on the floor in masking tape. In turn, each student placed their object into the room, deciding where it should go – perhaps it was a necklace placed in a locked draw, or a photograph on the bedside table, or a mobile phone discarded under the bed. As students placed their objects, I asked questions – was the phone new or was its screen cracked, did the necklace have a pendant, where and when was the photograph taken? This was a process of using drama, not as performance, but as an act of co-creating the story in a way that was low threat, cooperative and used oracy to build the setting. The students began to make connections between the objects, bouncing ideas off one another, making suggestions. I began to narrate aspects of the emerging story. We then created a character to inhabit the bedroom, inspired by the mix of objects they owned. We used a role-on-the-wall, drawing around somebody on a big piece of paper, writing on the outside characteristics that could be observed – they have short, chopped hair, they are wearing ripped jeans, they bite their nails – and on the inside writing their beliefs, attitudes or emotions – they are an introvert, passionate, insecure, independent. A dilemma was then introduced, intended to prompt the students to think, to open a space for negotiation, to engage emotions and to develop a point of view. I told them that their character had to leave this bedroom and their house. They would not be returning, and they would not see anybody who lived in the house again. This exercise was inspired by the Head of Children's Services at Barnardo's, who asked my wife and I to imagine a similar scenario as part of our preparation to become adoptive parents. The same thought exercise inspired a section of *Bea's Witch*, which I read to the students during the workshop. Their character, I told them, only had room in their bag to take five objects with them. They had to decide which the character would take. After discussion in small groups and then as a whole group, we moved into a time of writing, the students creating a diary entry about these events from the character's point of view, expressing their feelings and thoughts. These texts became part of the students'

anthologies, published at the end of the residencies. In the conference session, I then spoke about the final element of my PhD: writing a thesis to reflect on the process of constructing the novel and using it in schools. I've chosen to write my thesis as a choose your own adventure narrative – a second piece of creative writing. This less linear style attempts to capture the *experience of writing* and communicate that experience to the reader through its form. My thesis takes the reader on a tour of the town in which *Bea's Witch* is set. The reader can choose three different pathways, each providing a different theoretical lens onto the project and focusing on a different aspect of the process. At the start of the journey, the reader is given a 'footnotes earpiece' through which they can hear the author speak directly to them. The tour is also interspersed with a series of 'dialogues' with a fictional editor who comments on the text. I use these mechanisms as a way of bringing the critical and the creative aspects of the project into dialogue.

One of the things the participants in my conference session expressed an interest in, also picked up on in a later session about creative PhDs, was how the creative and critical elements of the thesis were inseparable, interwoven through the text. This brings me back to the image of the alchemist, melting distinct materials, transforming them into a new substance.

After the session, Seraphima gave me a challenge – to coin a term that described this form of academic text, one that weaves together the critical and creative in an inseparable way. I have been thinking about this since the conference and have some ideas. Watch this space...!

For me, the conference was a forum to meet new people, to hear about their work, and to reflect on my own endeavours, consolidating my thoughts and generating new ways to think and talk about my practice.

Perhaps, it might be described as an alchemist's crucible, a place in which base metals are melted, mixed, and are transformed into gold.



Daniel is an author, theatre maker and educator from Yorkshire. His books include *Bea's Witch: A ghostly coming-of-age story* (Lodestone Books) and *The Firebird Chronicles* (Our Street Books). He has a Masters in Creative Writing and Drama in Education from Leeds Beckett University, receiving the Dean's Prize for academic achievement, and is currently undertaking a PhD in creative writing and education. He has taught undergraduate teachers in creative practice and led teacher CPD sessions. Daniel is a *First Story* writer-in-residence and is part of the *Story Makers Company*. He regularly visits schools to speak and facilitate workshops.



To PhD or not to PhD

by Ruth Moore

... that was the question I and my friend and collaborator Sarah Stretton posed during our panel at the 2023 NAWE conference - chaired by the excellent Jane Moss. To be honest, it felt daringly early to propose a topic at all. My own PhD project was mere months old, and my NAWE membership was still box-fresh. Yet as discussion flowed back and forth between us and our passionate, engaged audience, I realised how glad I was that we had opened our debate to a wider community of writers.

To PhD or not to PhD began life as a thorny set of issues Sarah and I had grappled with personally since emerging from our Creative Writing MAs into the storm of 2020. Both of us felt instinctively that writing had a place in our day-to-day professional lives but were unsure how to embed it (in the absence of glittery publishing deals). Both of us, unashamed book nerds, acknowledged the siren call of three more years dedicated to writing, reading and teaching. Yet both of us lacked the financial security to set out on further study with ease.

At the conference our conversation about these issues morphed into something richer about how we make decisions in our writing lives. In this piece for *Writing in Education*, I offer my reflections and tips as a NAWE newbie for other writers who may wonder if further study has a place in their future.

... TO LIVE AS A WRITER

One of my motivations for pursuing a PhD is to gain experience of teaching in higher education. In my many pasts I have loved forays into teaching and workshop facilitation. During my MA I became intrigued by the pedagogy of creative writing, and how or whether university courses can balance traditional academic expectations with creative innovation. I knew I wanted to explore whether work in academia might have a place in my writerly quest to make ends meet. It was fascinating to listen in on conversations at the conference about the issues currently facing creative writing in HE – and heartening to witness the passion of those involved.

One of the themes which emerged from our session was to make sure that what you want from a PhD matches what your chosen institution can offer. I'm lucky, it turns out. At Exeter University, where I am now based, there is a nationally accredited programme to develop HE teaching skills. I've met fellow students who are interested in pedagogy too, and willing to muster peer support when impostor syndrome strikes in the classroom. But some at our conference session expressed disappointment that the teaching experience they hoped for during their PhDs did not materialise, making the already sparse academic job market look even bleaker.

Tip 1: Read the university blurb about courses ([Find a PhD](#) may get you started), but don't stop there. Ask current and former students. Ask the director of postgraduate research in your chosen department to put you in touch with a PhD student who is teaching. It is vital to know beforehand if the opportunities you hope for are likely at your university.

... TO DEVELOP AS A WRITER

My PhD is a creative-critical project with two intended outputs: a children's novel set in a troubled museum, and a piece of original research which explores the role that timeslip fiction for children can play in articulating silences in history. It is already altered from the project that I first proposed, and I trust it will continue to shapeshift until it finds the right form. All writing projects grow in unexpected ways, but the particular gift of my PhD so far is in offering a fertile ground for that growth. My supervisor goes for the jugular when she sees lazy thought in my critical writing or tame characterisation in my novel. I love that. My MA cohort formed a tight, pandemic-busting writer's workshop. Now I am getting to know more writers at Exeter, who are working deeply on challenging projects. The daily traffic of university events, reading groups and campaigns lights up new ideas and challenges for my project. Above all, there is time. Time to say yes to things, and to sustain a thought for long enough to distil it. Time to breathe.

Tip 2: Examine what you think is lacking in your writing life – then interrogate whether a postgraduate research environment is likely to provide that. Finding the right supervisor can feel like stumbling around in the dark if you don't have a prior connection – start early, be respectfully persistent, and ask current students how they found theirs.

...TO RISK AS A WRITER

Listening to scores of fantastic writers across the NAWE conference reminded me that we are all seasoned calculators of risk. If I take time to work some of my material into a competition entry or magazine submission, will it be worth it? If I apply for that writing residency, will I be in the right place mentally and emotionally to make work I am proud of? If I say yes to that unpaid workshop, will it lead to more opportunities? If I somehow scrape together the time and money to do a PhD, will I emerge at the other end as a better writer, with a more liveable onward path?

The calculation of risk is a deeply personal process, but we encouraged our session audience to be open and unashamed about the financial risk of undertaking a PhD. My plan A was to cobble together a doctoral loan while reducing my hours in a demanding job while caring for my primary-aged kids. I know now that the stress would have sunk me, but that's particular to me – it is possible with more flexible work. My plan B (which miraculously came about just in time) was to secure funding to study full-time. Only you can determine what is an acceptable level of risk for you and those who depend on you, but if applying for funding is part of your plan, use the experience of others to help you do so effectively.

Tip 3: Think long and hard about the cost. The [Arts and Humanities Research Council](#) will offer studentships through partnerships of universities in the area you live in, and individual universities offer scholarships too. It's fiercely competitive but not impossible. Apply for collaborative PhD projects which come with a topic, partners and funding built in. Ask the department you are considering if they will put you in touch with students who have won funding, or who are juggling their PhD with part-time work - ask if they feel it's working.

The beauty of Living as a Writer was that it provided a glimpse into a huge variety of ways to live the writing life. Writing in higher education alongside writing in communities, writing for wellbeing, and so much more. The PhD route is one amongst many. Thank you, NAWE, for making space for (very) new voices in amongst the rich experience of this year's conference.



Ruth Moore writes fiction and poetry, winner of the Bath Children's Novel Award (2020), shortlisted for the Bridport Prize (2021) and highly commended for the HWA Dorothy Dunnnett award (2022). After a first career in theatre, creative education, and project management, her PhD at (and funded by) Exeter University focuses on children's timeslip fiction and archival silences. She is represented by Steph Thwaites at Curtis Brown. Twitter: @RuthMoore

Co-presenter at the conference:

Sarah Stretton is a speculative poetry and fiction writer, winner of the SaveAs International Prose prize (2019) and longlisted for the Primadonna Prize (2020). Her work has been published in Oxford Poetry, Popshot and Retreat West to name a few. By day, she teaches literature, language and writing. Instagram: @selectedfictions



Creative Practice as Community Education

by Erica Masserano and Sam Dodd

CityLife: Stories for Change is a project that joins creative writing and community engagement to create life writing about experiences of life in London – stories that go beyond what is platformed in mainstream literature. We are now based at the University of East Anglia and University of Brighton, with a team composed of Tessa McWatt, Stephen Maddison, Sam Dodd and Erica Masserano and an archive of 100+ stories at <https://citylifestories.co.uk/>. We are in the ninth year of our project and have made several discoveries about our own process along the way. One of them is that the model CityLife created, where creative writing, community engagement and research are inseparable and interlocked, is educational for everyone involved. The results defy stereotypes, deepen social connection, and question our expectations – offering blueprints for future projects with the goals of promoting creativity, educating, and connecting our communities.

THE PROCESS

CityLife produces short pieces of non-fiction, biographical and autobiographical, about life in the city. In order to do this, a group of writers is paired with a group of community elders, in one-to-one pairings, through a collaboration with the community organisation they frequent; in our latest phase, Lockdown Stories, this has been social charity Toynbee Hall in East London. The writers come from Creative Writing, Journalism, and History degrees at the University of East London and the University of East Anglia, and have all been trained in life writing by novelist and professor Tessa McWatt. They receive additional training created ad-hoc for the project, in the cultural politics of representation and stereotyping, ethical interviewing techniques, and safeguarding. During a series of workshops facilitated by CityLife staff, the writers run unstructured life story interviews with the community elder they have

each been paired with, who themselves take on the role of “storyteller” – expert in their own experience. Then, the writers produce several drafts of a life writing piece inspired by their storyteller’s life. This collaborative process educates both writer and storyteller in the nuts and bolts of storytelling, through the decisions that they make in order to arrive at the final draft. In some cases, the writer may organise the biographical material offered by the storyteller in ways that the storyteller had not anticipated, effectively curating it for tellability and effect. In others, the storyteller will lead on form as well as content.

While the autobiographies are just as poignant and interesting, in this article we will focus on the biographies. Here is how one of them might look like, poised between biography and history, illuminated by the specific knowledge of culture and place that comes with a rootedness in the city, and suffused with nostalgia:

Johnny goes down on Clerkenwell Road to Terroni to order his homemade ravioli for Christmas, and thinks back to the ones he used to have when he was little. His mum used to make them herself, and the kids helped her. Johnny still has her little roller she used to flatten the pasta to then fill with *il ripieno*; where Johnny comes from, the traditional filling is mainly cheese with a bit of chicken stock and nutmeg. Then she’d flip them over and the kids would cut them and leave them on the tablecloth sprinkled with *farina* because they were a bit *umidi*. They’d have to stay there overnight and then in the morning they were nice and almost dry, though even when you put them on the plate you’d still put some tissue in between the layers so they didn’t stick together. It was always a wonderful thing to do because you only got to do it at Christmas; the rest of the year it was *pastina in brodo* and bread.

There were no *antipasti*, of course, the meal went straight to the pasta. To fill the pasta, to make the broth it was served in and the casserole to eat as *secondo*, they had one chicken to clean out that stayed on the stove for six or seven hours and boiled and boiled, very very slowly. Johnny liked the chicken broth so much that once grown up he’d make it himself and then freeze it, the pure chicken broth, so it didn’t go to waste. After that, all the goodness would be boiled out of the chicken, leaving this chicken that doesn’t have much taste to it, so that went in the *casseruola*. When Johnny was little, you’d only get chicken at Christmas.

[...]

Johnny walks past St Peter’s Church and the now-closed Italian School to Terroni, and looks towards Farringdon Road to his home in Victoria Dwelling, his mask on, in the neighbourhood he’s lived all his life. They say the streets around here were like a *piazza* once, everyone coming out to pass the time, especially in the summer, even the priests chatting to their parishioners from the step of the church. The ice cream vendors would go to Fraulo and Perelli for

their ice, then add it to the milk they boiled in their own kitchen and carry the ice cream around on a wheelbarrow and sell it. The men coming home from the asphalt or the statuette trade would walk home with paint or plaster dust on their faces and clothes; shoeshines would do their shoes for a few pennies. The women, poor and impeccably clean, would be trickling back in small groups from the shopping, pushing prams loaded with children and pasta, or just lifting sacks and packs from Leather Lane market in their strong arms and carrying a baby on their back. Kids would run after rag footballs, cats and dogs, risking being run over by carriages first and cars next. But right now, there’s barely anyone around, and the ‘Ill has never been so quiet.

A TWO-WAY STREET

Let us take a look at the discussions we have about education in the project itself. Education is part of the demographic data we collect about the participants, and we talk about it within the pairings. One of the most consistent demographic differences between the writer participant group and the storyteller participant group is that the writers are in university, while only a few of the storytellers have ever been in higher education (though some pursue lifelong learning through courses, community activities, self-directed reading, and less formally institutional types of education). This means that at times we have felt that some of our storytellers could misunderstand us in two ways. One, they thought we were from much wealthier backgrounds than them, because we were in university, and so when we disclosed our backgrounds it would be a moment of surprise and improved closeness. And two, they also reckoned we had high cultural status, or in their words, that we were “clever”, although in fact when we had more extensive conversations many were very aware of the structural factors around educational paths and how they had nothing at all to do with intelligence. Writers on the project have remarked on how sharing something of themselves is a way to build a relationship of trust with their storyteller. Having these open and honest conversations about our relationships to education contributed to levelling the playing field between participants who write and participants who tell stories, and would have not been considered appropriate if we had been using other, less interdisciplinary methodologies.

Another concrete instance of the importance of these exchanges is how CityLife connects groups that seldom interact. In interviews, some of our participants point out how they have lived in the same borough as the person they were paired with for their story all their life, but their paths had never crossed before. They also express that, based on their social lives, it would have been unlikely to get to know and have in-depth conversations with each other if not because of this project. Given the varied communities we engage with, most of them marginalised, we can speculate on the reasons why. These may range from the shape that sociality takes in a city whose infrastructures are being decimated by austerity, to a place which contains multitudes but where

communities with different cultural backgrounds can live parallel to one another without spaces for interaction being created and sustained. Or, the lack of accessibility to 'community' for people whose mobility is constricted by hostile architectural choices on the part of abled people, or who cannot get support to communicate with others in their preferred style. Or intergenerational separation under capitalism, meaning that the people who are not part of the cycle of production, such as our community elders, are pushed to the margins of social life. In concrete terms, we exchanged experiences of lockdown with other participants from our communities as it happened in ways that are nuanced and intimate, educating each other in real time. Sam, who was a telephone befriender volunteer with Toynbee Hall at the time and led our partnership with them, had conversations that resulted in a delicate piece foregrounding both the material realities of community elders under lockdown and the poetics of their everyday lives:

I've been trying to cope as best as I can during this pandemic. The lockdown was tough, didn't leave the house as much as I used to, just stayed in really, though still made it down to the corner shop to buy my fags and crossword books. I had my hair done a couple of weeks ago, hadn't done that for months. I felt ever so fancy. Toynbee Hall sent me colouring books and fiction novels through lockdown, and the pharmacy delivered my medication. I went out for food when I had to, I could sort that myself and I didn't mind. My housing association even called to check I was alright – I thought that was very thoughtful. Did a lot of colouring in and crosswords over the lockdown. This week, I went down the Roman as I needed a new microwave. It's nice to be able to go out a bit more again now. Didn't find the one I wanted on the Roman, so I got the bus down the Bethnal Green Road. One of those market stalls with the fridges and cookers on it too. Must be a pain for the stallholders when it rains – what with all them electrics. Anyway, Toynbee Hall sorted me out with a laptop! I've never used one before. Just getting used to it – looking at the weather, the news, some pictures, all that. I'll never put my bank details in that thing.

I don't know of anyone in my immediate circle who got COVID, but I watch the news a lot – the numbers were frighteningly high. They still are. The NHS response to COVID is amazing. Unbelievable. The nurses and doctors are so good at what they do. Nobody in my neighbourhood did the clap for carers, not that I saw or heard myself anyway. I missed my mum during lockdown – she was in a supported living home in Bethnal Green.

My priority in life now is trying to stay healthy and listening to doctors. I have a lot of health issues now, all of which came later on in life – I was a fit young thing in the old days. I'm still eating chocolate though – even though I'm not meant to! And still chuffing away on the cigarettes! I went for another scan yesterday. Have a lot of scans these days, that happens when you get old. The results will go to my

doctor. Not a particularly exciting week. Haven't really seen anyone. What I do on any day depends on the weather. I can't ride my scooter when it's raining cos I gotta hold a broolly at the same time. If I ride, I get soaked – if I hold the broolly, can't ride!

[...]

Been sorting out me winter jumpers. Coming up winter now, and I like me jumpers. Had a shower, washed me hair. Things like that. The decorator has gone now, it's all finished. It looks nice, it feels good to have a fresh home. And me tea is in the oven. I've got a bit of cod in. Don't like the ones with bones, too fiddly.

A SITE OF CONFRONTATION

We have realised that we can ask the writers to explore a certain theme for the stories in each phase, inasmuch as it is possible to do so. They are also instructed to drop this aim if it starts forcing the exchanges between pairs. This way, we always end up with a wealth of lived experience about it which we can research. In the context of the lockdowns, this meant that we were able to understand both personal and institutional responses to the Covid pandemic from within the stories we collected.

Some of these stories during the Covid pandemic were also a site of unexpected confrontation. Erica, a pro-vaccine writer who was deeply concerned about her vulnerable family members in another country, found herself working with a storyteller whose positions about Covid were a lot more relaxed, at times involving denialism, or at the least a very accepting attitude towards the unfolding of the pandemic. CityLife has protocols for managing difficult conversations, de-escalating conflicts, and facing the use of oppressive language – which all writers are trained in. While the exchanges themselves were not in any way aggressive, it was helpful to the writer to know that they had options. Erica believes that this must necessarily mean a better experience for the community elder as well, as she had tools for processing her emotions in real time as the disagreements happened and was therefore able to keep the conversation constructive and pleasant.

Through these exchanges, it became apparent that for the storyteller, who is a brain damage survivor, it is incredibly important to maintain a positive attitude at all times, and that this was informing their attitude. The pair also found that they could agree on the fact that mixed messaging from the government had not been helping people in forming a reasoned reaction to the anguish of the lockdowns. Participants have remarked how this type of mutual understanding would not have been possible, for example, on social media, where the inflexibility of people's opinions and the background noise from others interjecting does not make constructive and empathetic dialogue possible. Having educated each other on the reasons behind their perspectives, they were able to form a more nuanced understanding of each other, and to find a joint message for the story that was true to the

storyteller's beliefs and respectful of the writer's need for a message she could endorse:

The mixed messages from the government: don't go out but go back to work; don't go out of your house but you can go to restaurants, you can go to pubs; communication was clearer last time, when they just had a clear directive, do not go out, boom, period, but it's only when people started getting financial penalties they actually started taking notice

It's strange

The news on TV, which is all negative, he thinks it is too negative, he doesn't do negative; just like with Covid, he says, the people who he knows who had Covid have come through the other side, they want to keep people in a dark place, once the light starts coming through people will see that it's not that bad

I'm here, I'm here, I'm OK

The pandemic, which he calls a plan-demic; in history illnesses keep coming and going, it's just evolution, people have to learn from the experiences of the past, it appears to him that we're not learning; we have to learn to be nice to each other, look after each other, just be nice, it's not too difficult

Don't do tomorrow what you can do today

God, who made the world and we are going to end it, whenever Miles needs to he can turn to his faith, what's going on in the world today has all been written, it has all been foreseen by past scholars

He laughs

The bonds you have with people, so many are passing away and if you didn't take the opportunity to talk to them then you will have lost it, he has seen too many people pass suddenly like his friend Frankie from the estate, it's life, people come, people go; especially in times like now, it doesn't matter how the relationship is, you have to grab on to it

Don't do tomorrow what you can do today

The sudden rain batting the ground outside the Toynbee Hall windows while we're having what he calls his therapy session

It's therapy because we're talking

But really, it hasn't been that much of a change at all, except for the staying inside and the touching

The touching is a big change

BLUEPRINTS FOR THE FUTURE

There are also stories that offer snapshots of the institutional response to this pandemic and others. These include stories which detail the response of community organisations the participants were engaged with at the

time of the lockdown, as seen in one of the previous extracts, and stories in collaboration with participants who were healthcare providers during the peak of the AIDS/HIV pandemic, a topic which we plan to address in future research. We have also included the perspective of staff who worked in these community organisations, although they do not fit our usual storyteller profile. This is because we found the opportunity to understand pandemic response from several sides invaluable.

What we have found is that, as many workers in the health, education and social sector will know, the only way for community organisations to respond to the many and varied needs of their users was to go above and beyond governmental guidelines and workload boundaries and into mutual aid practices. Given the current defunded and broken-up condition of state infrastructure and non-governmental support alike, it would have been impossible, and it still is, for community organisations to keep up with the demand for aid. This is why successful schemes leaned on communities as much as they supported them, with overwhelming positive response from volunteers. Again, we were educated in action through conversations that help our understanding of what's viable and effective, and we contributed to the conversation by offering a scheme of our own. CityLife participants appreciated being able to engage with others remotely during lockdown; the phonecalls rarely came in under the recommended half hour a week, and several pairings stayed in touch after their story had been written and approved. Some used the word "therapeutic" to describe these exchanges, which confirms our hypothesis that a project such as CityLife might be well suited to improve resilience, something we were all in dire need of during lockdowns.

In this context, CityLife offers an opportunity to inform our response to situations of need through creative practice, intergenerational bonding and critical thinking, with the aim of educating communities and empowering them to articulate what best practice means when trying to respond to their needs.

My main concern was how we'd keep in touch with our clients. Quite a few of them say quite often that if they didn't have Toynbee to visit, they'd be depressed. Either that, or they were depressed, until they found Toynbee. They also love all the activities we do here. And so many of them don't even have mobile phones. So, as I didn't know whether we'd be able to access the database from home, I had to download our clients, more than four hundred, so that we had a way to be in touch with them. The first week was just mad. We just called everyone to let them know that we were closed, and because I was still fairly new, I didn't know all their names properly yet.

[...]

So many people didn't have food or prescriptions – they didn't know how to go and get it, or were too frightened to leave the house. Prescription runs had to be done in pairs, to hold each other accountable for

the medication staying safe between the pharmacy and the community members' home. I got in touch with the Tower Hamlets Volunteer Centre and they published my advert, and within a week I had over 50 volunteer sign ups! There was so much goodwill, so many people, in this community who wanted to help other people in their community.

[...]

Some of our clients have incredibly complex stories. I wish I had time to hear everyone's. But sometimes there is a huge language barrier. And the problem I've seen with that is that when there is a language barrier, everything becomes simplified in order to relay the message, so it becomes about the very basic needs – food, rent, heating, etc. Every person has so much more than that. Thoughts, dreams, life experiences. We don't want to reduce them down to whether they need to use the food bank or not. They are so much fuller than that, they are a whole person, and we need to always remember that when delivering services. The people who come us are human being. Same as all of us. We are human, trying to survive, trying to love as fully as we can, do our best with the tools we were given.

[...]

How can you understand a situation or a problem unless you go into that group of people that is affected, and ask them, talk to them – and listen properly? This is their lived experience. You cannot design policy without it, and when we do, it doesn't serve the intended individuals. So many times, assumptions are made. "We know better because we design the rules." But no, that is not how it works. People are not voiceless, faceless numbers. Listen to their voices, ask them what they need.

The project's relationship to education is not limited to an extractive approach where the storyteller's function is an informant who educates us, but is based around exchange and confrontation. At the same time, these exchanges are scaffolded to ensure mutual respect and an outcome that fosters change. This is how we mobilise creative modes of production of knowledge to create new models that are positive and forward-looking. Our stories are urgent, artful, and diverse. We would love for them to be heard and for the situated knowledges they contain to inform and educate at all levels, using narrative to stimulate civic life – telling, writing, and sharing stories for change.

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Erica Masserano is a PhD student in Creative Writing and Cultural Studies at the University of East London, and the recipient of a [Stuart Hall Foundation](#) scholarship. She is a [freelance](#) researcher, editor and translator in journalism, academia and multimedia. Her background includes cultural studies, narrative research and working with marginalised populations. She is the Life Writing facilitator at OLIVE, a course for students with a refugee background wishing to study in the UK. She has been a CityLife researcher since 2017 and editor since 2019.



Sam Dodd is a graduate of Creative Writing at UEL and City, University of London's MSc Library Science programme, and has been awarded five awards for her research and contributions to academic and East London communities. She is a community engagement specialist working across the areas of oral history, local history, and underrepresented stories. Sam is also Operations Manager at the Poetry Translation Centre and has a ten-year history of arts admin across multiple well-known [London literature charities](#). She is a writer, editor, researcher, and a Trustee at [Spread the Word](#) writer development agency. Sam co-founded CityLife, and has coordinated and managed it since our inception in 2014.



Crowd-Source, Collaboration, or Co-Creation?

by Leanne Moden

STRATEGIES FOR EMPOWERING GROUPS TO TRY CREATIVE WRITING

Creative Writing can be a daunting prospect for community groups, and adults can find poetry particularly hard to engage with, especially if they didn't enjoy English lessons at school. For many, having low levels of literacy – being “bad at English” – can throw up emotional barriers, making these potential poets reluctant to experiment with words.

A communal poem is a great way to support community groups to create poetry, in a way that's very accessible to new writers. Communal poems foster a sense of shared creativity, and build up writers' confidence, leaving them in a much better position to continue writing for themselves. Groups have autonomy over the work they create, and the process can be tailored to match participants ages, abilities and language competency.

I've developed three different tiers of working, when it comes to writing communal poetry:

- **Crowd-Sourced Writing:** Ideas are sourced via discussion with participants, staff, visitors, members of the public at an organisation, and the poem is built by the poet or writer in residence, using those contributions.

- **Collaborative Writing:** The facilitator works with participants to choose the theme and write and edit the poem together, but the facilitator also has a hand in shaping the piece of writing.
- **Co-Created Writing:** Participants have full autonomy over the work. They might decide the genre (prose, poem, script) and work together to develop the piece at every stage – fully involved in the writing, drafting, editing etc.

When starting a communal writing project, you need to be aware of a few things:

1. Who are you working with? Who are the organisation and the potential participants, what experience of writing or creativity have they had before, and what are they hoping to get from the project?
2. What does the organisation want from the project? Is it purely for participants (no output necessary) or is there an element of output required. Where will the finished piece be displayed, printed, or performed?
3. How are you going to gather the writing? Will the participation take place in person, online, via writing activities, via questionnaires, via conversations?
4. How are you going to construct the poem? Is it crowd-sourced, Collaborative or Co-Created by the group?

At this year's NAWE Writers' Conference, I shared two case studies from recent community projects I've facilitated, talking about the different types of creative collaboration that teachers and workshop leaders can use to create communal poetry. The first is an example of crowd-sourced writing, and the second is a collaborative piece.

CASE STUDY 1: THE F PROJECT IN WARRNAMBOOL, AUSTRALIA

The F Project is a community art gallery in Warrnambool, which is a rural town three hours' west of Melbourne in Australia. This was a virtual writers' residency, which took place online over the course of six months and was facilitated and paid for by Melbourne UNESCO City of Literature. I applied to the project with a plan of community engagement, which included writing workshops, an online poetry performance, and a crowd-sourced poem, created from words and phrases submitted by community users, artists, and visitors to The F Project.

The F Project were looking for a poem that celebrated the work of their organisation. They wanted something they could share on their website and social media pages, and that served as a way for community users, staff, volunteers, and artists to share their positive experiences of the project. As the aim of the poem was primarily promotional, it made sense to use the crowd-sourced writing technique in this case.

As the project was conducted entirely online (across 10,500 miles and a 10-hour time difference) I used Zoom

conversations, emails and an online form to gather ideas from the participants. If I had been working in the gallery itself, I might also have used a post-it notes board, comments box, or individual conversations with visitors to gather ideas and opinions.

As a way to provoke ideas, I asked participants questions that left room for unusual metaphors to emerge. For example: "If the F Project was a food, what food would it be and why?" Once I had the results, I took all the responses and ideas from conversations, and fit them together like puzzle pieces to create the finished collection of four poems.

Here's one of the crowd-sourced poems. It was inspired by responses to the question "If the F Project was a colour, what colour would it be, and why?"

THE COLOUR OF MAGIC

This canvas, fresh with possibility;
as white as hope, an artist's cherished space.
Now, add the blue, as calming as the sea.
An outpouring of love, like an embrace.

Bright aqua, peaceful, soothing and serene,
but powerful. A visionary hue.
And time well-spent, a rich ultramarine,
togetherness and inspiration too.

The warmth of earth, a heartfelt, reddish-brown;
foundation for our creativity.
And deep black ink to write each idea down;
the colours flow in painted symphonies.

Bring silver glitter for the laughs we share,
and golden sparkles, shining like the sun.
Potential crackles through the open air;
fourteen years on – we've only just begun!

Add lemon yellow for community;
a light to guide creative souls back home.
Each coppered-coloured opportunity,
shines joyful red, a philanthropic rose.

Then cadmium – a glowing, growing green –
to symbolise the skills we've cultivated.
These turquoise skies, the rainbows that we've seen,
the friendships that we've nurtured and created.

A multi-coloured, unique work of art;
this universe, all luminous with stars.
A place to find relief and fill our hearts,
where every colour makes us who we are.

CASE STUDY 2: HIGH PEAK COMMUNITY ARTS IN BUXTON, DERBYSHIRE

High Peak Community Arts is an organisation that provides arts activities to groups of adults with mental health issues. Their participant group also includes autistic adults, and members with learning difficulties, and the group mostly focuses on provision for visual arts. The majority of the group hadn't done creative writing since school. The aim of the project was to create a poem

Hope is a Friday feeling,
fresh, thoughtful and optimistic.
A new day ahead.

Hope is cooking in the kitchen,
a soft, uplifting voice, filling the room with golden light,
a way of changing things for the better.

Possible Challenges:

Of course, there are challenges around communal writing, as with any type of workshop facilitation, but here are some suggestions to solve common issues you might encounter:

Accessibility – how do we support groups who are unable to write?

In the past, I've asked groups to work together to produce ideas, or requested volunteers to scribe for group members who have trouble with literacy. You can also choose to record creative conversations (either via audio recorder, or on video) and write together as a group using a white board, or on large sheets of paper. Preparing a mix of writing tasks, speaking and listening tasks, and group work ensures that everyone's voice is heard. I also chat to individuals during each session, and note down any good words or phrases they use.

Generating ideas – how do we find and nurture ideas and find enough material to make a story / poem?

In order to discover the poem during the writing process, I make sure I have plenty of overlapping activities on the theme, using lots of different stimuli (including music, visual art, objects, conversation etc) to inspire ideas. It also helps to be flexible – remember to ask questions and support the participants to find the answers themselves.

Valuing everyone's input – how do we make sure everyone feels like their ideas have been heard?

I always make sure I talk to everyone in the group as often as possible, get an idea of their interests, and use that as a basis to help them find their contribution. I also make sure my facilitation is flexible and agile, and the sessions are being led by suggestions made by the group, particularly unconventional suggestions that take the work in new and exciting directions. Finally, I make sure I map and highlight everyone's contributions in the final piece, so participants can see where their words have landed in the finished poem.

Managing organisational expectations – how do we ensure the finished poem is of a high quality?

This one involves an open dialogue with the organisation (and participants) about what they want from the project. Are they more interested in the process or the output, and is quality of the output more important than the participant experience? Once I know this, I will then suggest the type of communal writing that would best suit their circumstances.

Ultimately, when working with community groups, the process is the product. While the quality of the finished poem is important, the most important thing is that the community feel that they've been empowered to write poetry, to share their thoughts, and to stretch their creativity.



Leanne Moden is a poet and freelance creative type, based in Nottingham. She's performed poetry all across Europe, she's been a national semi-finalist at the BBC Edinburgh Fringe Slam, and her second collection, *Get Over Yourself* was published in 2020 by Burning Eye Books. Leanne facilitates creative writing workshops across the UK, and she's currently a writer in residence with First Story, a workshop leader with Writing East Midlands and the National Literacy Trust, and a project manager at the Newark Book Festival.



Writing as an Act of Survival

by Melissa Bailey and Sarah Bower

We live in an age where our lives, our 'brand' are curated and cultivated in online spaces. There is the 'public self' as mediated through social media, the self as explored in writing, and then there is the private self who must deal with all the challenges – big and small - of our lives: earning a living, navigating the ups and downs of our students, our children, our parents, our partners. There are always a multitude of reasons why we write - some of us write to distract ourselves, some write to make sense of the world, or for therapy or to earn money, or for acclaim or and personal gain.

Sometimes it's easier to try and keep all these different selves separate, for our own sanity and safety. But sometimes in life there comes a point when everything changes. The brain will no longer accept separation - a traumatic response can take over. In the workshop, *Writing as an Act of Survival*, Sarah Bower and Melissa Bailey shared personal life events which affected their lives and explored how their writing selves, and their private selves, responded to these events.

In her talk, Melissa Bailey shared how her brain responded very differently to losing two husbands to unexpected death. After the first bereavement, in 2012, she describes how her brain shut down: 'It wasn't until later that I

understood that I had developed quite a common response to trauma – a shutting down of the prefrontal cortex which affects our ability to read and write – because the body no longer thinks you are safe.’ She was unable to read or write fiction for several years. Ten years later, having learned to live with loss and rebuilt her life, in very different circumstances, her children having left home with fewer financial pressures, Melissa lost her husband, unexpectedly to a heart attack. This time Melissa described how ‘writing has become my act of Survival. It’s what gets me up in the morning, what gives my day shape.’

In her talk, ‘The Ordinary Instant’, Sarah Bower explores how everything in life can change in a moment, with reference to Pauline Boss’s theory of ambiguous loss – physical absence with psychological presence and psychological absence with physical presence. She shared her experience of her son’s arrest, the ordinary instant everything changed, and his subsequent detention in jail. ‘I am now part of a family from which a significant member has been physically removed yet remains psychologically present.... Dad/brother/son/husband is a disembodied voice, a pixelated pattern on a screen, the physical represented by no more than an agitation of sound and light waves.’ Sarah described how the physical absence of her son has impacted the development of the novel she was already writing before the moment of her son’s arrest.

In the discussion after the presentation, participants in the workshop generously shared their strategies for survival. One participant describes how, after her husband died, she ran writing workshops in the hospice for other bereaved people. Another contributor described how writing helped her to make sense of her new reality after her divorce. Contributors shared the kinds of reading which helps us to ‘get us through’. For some people, favourite classic novels, read and reread, provide comfort. For others, books with an enthralling plot or crime fiction distract the agitated brain. Some of us have found the discipline of daily writing gives a structure; a few people mentioned that they turn to writing and reading poetry in times of crisis.

At the end of her talk, Sarah described how crisis can morph into everyday life. The hope for us all is that, as Sarah describes, loss can ‘strengthen and sharpen’ and bring new directions and deeper connections for our work.

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Melissa Bailey is a Staff Tutor and experienced associate lecturer, at the Open University, where she is also reading for a PhD in Creative Writing. She has been involved with a number of co-created writing and drama projects including standing in the rain as a living statute and constructing the eco installation ‘Dodge’. Her BA and PGCE were from London University in English and Drama, her Creative Writing MA was achieved at Lancaster University



Sarah Bower writes fiction and creative non-fiction. A novella, *Lines and Shadows*, will be published in August 2023. She is an Associate Lecturer at the Open University, where she is also a PhD candidate in creative and critical writing. Her younger son is currently serving a thirteen year prison sentence..

Fay Weldon Remembered

by Celia Brayfield



Fay Weldon's first novel, *The Fat Woman's Joke*, published in 1967, was to be the first of over thirty in her awe-inspiring career. Fay was the most important novelist of second wave of feminism in Britain, not only because of her huge popular success – she must be the only novelist to have been serialized in a teenage magazine one year and shortlisted for the Booker Prize the next - but also because of her fearless engagement with the biological reality of women's lives, from pregnancy to cosmetic surgery, in novels such as *Puffball*, *Praxis* and *The Life and Loves of a She Devil*. But she set so many hares running. She wrote the pilot of *Upstairs Downstairs* TV series, making her the godmother of *Gosford Park* and *Downton Abbey*, and the first and best television adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

So how did this revolutionary iconoclast become Professor Fay Weldon CBE, our cherished colleague at Bath Spa University, whose office door was never really shut? She was in her 70s and a national treasure by the time my then head of subject at Brunel University London informed me a few tactful weeks after my serendipitous recruitment that my real job description involved recruiting a high profile writer to enable the higher degrees which I had just created. I confided in my agent, who was also Fay's agent at that time, and he said casually, "You can try - she might go for it."

Fay was already almost notorious for her generosity to developing writers and had helped me with enthusiasm when I wanted to change direction in my novels. I sent a tentative email and was thrilled to get a positive response. Ahead lay the gruesome ordeal of the ifull-dress academic interview with a distinguished panel of engineers and scientists. Fay, ignoring expectations of Powerpoint and KPI compatibility, simply turned up with a tower of her own books and charmed the panel – as she was to charm students and colleagues ever afterward.

She proved the most generous and benevolent of colleagues, inspiring love and admiration from students and academics alike. As a tutor she swiftly put overawed students at their ease, and usually followed with advice to break any rule except those of grammar and punctuation. Her office was soon equipped with a fridge, as we always seemed to be celebrating someone's success and wine needed to be chilled.

As a writer, Fay of course had a large vocabulary, but it apparently did not include the word "no." Above all, I remember Fay's particular smile, the tentative, wavering smile with which she greeted the more egregious absurdities of academic life, the smile that said, "Isn't it the best fun that we know this is ridiculous but we're going to do it anyway?" I especially remember it when her request to entertain our first MA graduates to a cream tea on graduation day was denied on the grounds that the event had not been risk-assessed.

As a tutor Fay had an extraordinary instinct for every student's vision and could draw out and respond to the essence of what they wanted to do, with the result that they left her office with radiant confidence.

Her influence went far beyond teaching and mentoring. One of our students now publishes, teaches, is a Royal Literary Fund Fellow and ran the Writers Guild south west branch. Another said simply, "I work in publishing now because of Fay."

You can't quantify the impact of a teacher like Fay. No metrics to measure her legacy, the inspiration of generations of writers, the paradigm shifts in our understanding of ourselves and our lives, our past and our futures. But we can remember it and Bath Spa University has chosen to do this with an annual lecture on a theme inspired by her work.

The first Fay Weldon Memorial Lecture will take place in Bath on November 7 2023

Portrait of Fay Weldon by Professor Gavin Cologne-Brooks.



Dr Celia Brayfield SFHEA is the author of nine novels and non-fiction books including biography, travel writing and social commentary. Her next book is *Writing Black Beauty: Anna Sewell and the Story of Animal Rights* (The History Press, July 2023.) She is a Senior Lecturer at Bath Spa University and a member of the NAWHE Higher Education Committee.

Practising & Preaching the Writing of Lament

by Anna Morvern

Writing and facilitating expressive writing courses has only ever been one strand of my working life, amidst other commitments, variously as a lawyer, translator, English teacher and occasional speaker (besides mothering as a single parent).[i] In early 2020, like most educators, my writing facilitation work shifted online due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the social restrictions it entailed in Ireland, where I live. Several participants in my writing groups were nurses or carers at this time. Later that year, I discovered an important article in *The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing*, emphasizing the value of lament, which I was tangentially researching as a poetic form for a book that I had begun to write. The author, Marsha D. Fowler, explains:

“Why lament? [. . .] A lament requires the courage to name one’s fears and vulnerabilities, to unmask social ills and concerns, and to do so within a society or culture that does not support this. A lament is a form of protest that enables the naming of what is tragic, fearful, damaging, wrong, unjust, angering, and more. A lament requires a movement from denial and avoidance to a place of acknowledgement and naming of one’s troubles and woundedness. The person who laments moves from ‘not me, not here, not now’ to a place of acknowledgement, ‘yes me, yes here, and yes now,’ giving voice to what is frightening, wrong, and unjust.”[ii]

This useful, expanded explanation of why lamentation can be helpful reminds me of Tristine Rainer’s inspirational long-list of all that journalling can be—from “a place to advise yourself”, through “a technique for focusing your energies on what is immediately important” to “a memory aid” and “a way to become your own guide and guru”—which I often read aloud in new expressive writing groups.[iii]

In my own writing, I was looking back to biblical JOB, and, in her article, Marsha D. Fowler relies on a study of the structure of the PSALMS to identify elements of the lament.[iv] With my groups, we reviewed Fowler’s simplified table of lament components and we created something akin to the following list for our own use:

- an initial cry for help;
- the enemy identified;
- how I feel;
- questioning using ‘why’, ‘where’, ‘how’;
- any expression of trust or faith (in God, or science, or fellow humans);
- what we remain grateful for or what we need.

In late 2020 into 2021, when my classes were taking place online, the Republic of Ireland was still at “Level 5”, the highest level of restrictions, meaning: no visitors to private homes or gardens; no organised indoor or outdoor gatherings; no sports matches or events; swimming pools closed and travel/exercise permitted within 5km of home only.[v] It felt premature to conclude our online classroom lament poems, particularly, for example, with redemptive lines, given the uncertainty of what lay ahead, so our focus was much more on experimenting with the structure above, rather than ending the pieces. Nonetheless, in my own book-writing and also in the group writing, using lament, I witnessed the affirmation of “me, here, now” that Fowler identifies as the place of acknowledgement in her writing. In the classes, participants began to connect the unprecedented event in their lives of the pandemic with other times when they had felt afraid, or isolated, or burdened in very personal ways. A whole-world phenomenon was given individual voice by each person, affirming the uniqueness of experience, affirming presence.

As someone who facilitates trauma-centred, or, at the least, trauma-informed work, I also reflect that lament helpfully evades an emphasis on “what happened”. Although narrative often does emerge, the structure of the lament does not bring an overbearing focus to the causal event, which can be the case in other forms of personal writing such as testimony. Lament has proven to be vital for my own book, and I can foresee the value of this form for other survivors of traumas such as rape and torture because it is a flexible container, almost comparable to a sonnet in this respect. It can be used to express pain, feelings and needs, whilst circumnavigating the “difficulty of telling” which can make writing on personal trauma so burdensome and can actually lead to

storytelling creating harmful effects.[vi]

Years have passed since those early pandemic writing classes. Many of us, though, are still taking stock as to how we survived Covid-19, whilst the losses of that time may often be felt quite acutely. By the time that NAWE members were meeting up to discuss “Living as a Writer”, I had realised that I could do without many things: a good income and fixed work pattern, schooling for my children, further postgraduate studies, a significant social life, travel, mental stability, days when I shed no tears...but I could scarcely do without writing.

My own writing project, incidentally a completely unfunded project, had begun with an idea to write in dialogue with the beloved journals of an American Jewish diarist, Alfred Kazin, whose work I now well understand may be politically neglected of late because of his disparaging critique of the concentration camp

memories of Nobel laureate and Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel.[vii] All of Kazin’s post-war writing can be read as a lament about the Holocaust, on so many levels, and perhaps his commitments to both the diary form, which I have used throughout my life, and to lament, were part of the reason that I felt empowered to write my own book, relying on the structural form of a lament.

In post-pandemic, or post-traumatic, living, we can look to lament in our own writing and in our classes to carry us to a place of acknowledgement that may yet prove to us that writing is an act of faith. To quote Alfred Kazin, in his journal writing in praise of Polish poet, Czeslaw Milosz, this is the “hope and prayer, the absolute strangeness of believing, even in so destructive and fanatical an age as ours, that one’s writing is important.”[viii]

FOOTNOTES

[i] I have written previously about my work facilitating expressive writing projects with a Northern Ireland prison. Morvern, A. (2015) ‘Biomums and Birobites. Anna Morvern reflects on two writing projects with a prison in Northern Ireland’. Writing in Education [online], No. 65, Summer 2015. Available from: <https://www.nawe.co.uk/DB/wie-editions/articles/biomums-and-birobites.html> [accessed 18 March 2022].

[ii] Fowler, M.D. (2020) ‘Woe is Me, I am Undone: Lament in a Time of Suffering and Distress’. OJIN: The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing [online], 25, no. 3, July 2020. Available from: <https://ojin.nursingworld.org/MainMenuCategories/ANAMarketplace/ANAPeriodicals/OJIN/TableofContents/Vol-25-2020/No3-Sept-2020/Articles-Previous-Topics/Woe-is-Me-I-am-Undone-Lament-in-a-Time-of-Suffering-and-Distress.html> [accessed 18 March 2022].

[iii] Rainer, T. (1978) *The New Diary*. New York: St Martin’s Press, p.19.

[iv] Westermann, C. (1961) *Praise and lament in the Psalms*. 2nd ed. Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press.

[v] Government of Ireland (2021) *Covid-19 Resilience and Recovery. The Path Ahead*. Ireland: Government of Ireland.

[vi] There are too many studies to cite in this area at present but there has been a lot of analysis in recent years of the problems of narrative story-telling for survivors of rape and torture, after #metoo, particularly where the focus is on using a redemptive template of some kind. I spoke about facilitating writing groups with survivors of rape in my presentation on ‘Survivors with Biros’ (Survivors With Biros is a survivor-led project enabling survivors to use expressive writing) at the NAWE Conference, November 2019.

[vii] I have written about this elsewhere: Anna Morvern. NEW PUBLICATION: New autobiographical book on trauma and mystical relationship relies on Elie Wiesel and Alfred Kazin. H-Judaic. 04-24-2023. <https://networks.h-net.org/node/28655/discussions/12756801/new-publication-new-autobiographical-book-trauma-and-mystical>. However, please note, at the time of going to press, the book referenced in this article has not been published on 28 May 2023, as publication has been put on hold to resolve legal issues. For reference, see: Kazin, A (1989) ‘My Debt to Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi’ in Rosenberg, David (ed.) TESTIMONY: CONTEMPORARY WRITERS MAKE THE HOLOCAUST PERSONAL. New York: Times Books, p.121, as cited by Kuelker, M. (1996) ‘Kazin vs Wiesel’, Humanities and Social Sciences Online, H-Holocaust discussion. Accessed online: <https://tinyurl.com/2utn5sfb> [18 March 2022]

[viii] Kazin, A. (1995) *Writing Was Everything*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, p.151.



Anna Morvern is a writer, teacher and translator. She is a human rights lawyer by background who has acted for many refugees before the courts in England and Ireland and was the international trial observer for Amnesty International at the court martial of US army medic found guilty of desertion for refusing to participate in the Iraq War. Facilitating writing groups in prison and the community for the past decade, Morvern also speaks and writes about human experience and ideas.

Adoption Names

by Eve Makis

CREATIVE WRITING AS RESEARCH TOOL IN A PIONEERING PROJECT INTO ADOPTIVE NAMES

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Write about your name. Do you like it? Are you indifferent? Tell us a story associated with your name. Do you know its origins? Were you named after someone? What would you be called if you had the power to change your name and why?

I have used this simple writing exercise dozens of times in writing classes. The results are often surprising, moving and revelatory. People write about family relationships and reveal rich detail about their lives. Our names are super-charged words, deeply personal and intimately connected to our sense of belonging and identity.

My experience in the field of life-writing and running classes in the local community brought me into contact with Dr Jane Pilcher. We work at the same university where I teach creative writing and she is a social sciences professor, an onomastician, an expert in names. She asked me to collaborate on a project that would allow us to use creative writing as a research tool in a pioneering UK project, gathering the name stories of people who have experienced adoption, both adoptees and adopters.

Funded by the Leverhulme Trust, the study aims to address the current limitations of knowledge and understanding about adoption names and naming. Our results could ultimately inform and shape current adoption policy, offer guidance to parents looking to

change the name of their adopted child and advise on best practice. And what a thrilling prospect. To think that creative writing could bring about change for the better and improve people's lives.

Originally, Dr Pilcher had planned to capture name stories through interviews alone before coming across sociological studies which had used various types of creative writing methods to tap into people's feelings and experiences. She said, *'I hadn't used this method before in any of my previous studies. I was persuaded by arguments that, through this research tool of creative writing, people could interpret and express their experiences at a deeper or at least different level than merely through answering questions in a conversational style interview.'*

Some researchers have argued that using creative writing can liberate participants from anxiously focusing on producing a 'true' account, in such a way as to allow people to focus more clearly on the meaning of the experience. We believe our approach will help us gain a more nuanced understanding while inviting participants to nurture and release their creativity. We hope the writing process itself will produce new insights for the participants and ultimately benefit their sense of wellbeing.

I was tasked with producing a life-writing workbook and associated video tailored to the specific profile of adults who were adopted as children, and adults with adopted children. In 2019, I published a co-written life writing

guide which allowed people to write about their lives in short, manageable bursts and included brief literary extracts to inspire and inform. I used the book to run life-writing workshops for marginalised and vulnerable people with little or no experience of creative writing. The format worked, teasing out incredible stories in places least likely to encourage writing as a means of self-expression: probation centres, refugee groups and homes for the elderly.

I used the same format to develop the project resources. Short prompts with accompanying literary extracts. Choosing writers such as Lemn Sissay and Jackie Kay who had written about their experience of adoption – while being careful to select lines that did not reflect the experience as positive or negative. In an early version of the booklet, one participant reported being triggered by the word ‘torture’ in one of the extracts and this was subsequently removed. Under the guidance of the project leader and two expert researchers, the prompts were edited and reworked to develop a sensitive research tool with a gentle approach.

The prompts take a lateral approach to exploring themes of identity, belonging and family connections, rather than asking questions head on. There are prompts about the meaning of names, about the experience of name change and the origin of family names. Participants are encouraged to freewrite on the subject of names ie to write non-stop without editing. One exercise is ‘a letter that will never be sent’ to the person who named them in the case of the adoptees, or in the case of parents, to the child they adopted to tell them about the reason for their name choices. This prompt has generated the most emotive and heartfelt responses. Here’s a fragment of the letter written by a mother who trialled our resources:

Do you love your name as much as we do? I hope it makes you feel unique, strong and fabulous... like a superhero. I want you to know that we called you Angel as we know you have superpowers. We know that as our Angel, you came to be our son as an answer to our prayers. You came to let us pour out our love and enjoy our lives as much as we can with as much noise and fun as we can. Thank you.

I tried to make the exercises fun and stimulating. In the online, video workshop, I share my own name stories (we all have them) just as I would in a face-to-face class. Often, people aren’t quite sure what they’re expected to write until you give them some pointers. They don’t always realise the importance of their stories until you

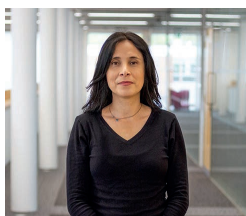
tell them your own and encourage them to make those stories individual by using specific detail.

The two-year project began last September. Participants have been recruited and a number of workbooks have already been completed. A second research tool will be used to explore the theme even further – a series of one-to-one life story interviews. These will engage with the content in the participants’ creative writing and fill in any gaps.

We hope participation in the project will be a positive experience. The potential of life-writing to help people with challenging life circumstances and improve mental wellbeing is well documented. Initial results would suggest this is the case but don’t take it from me. I’ll leave you with the words of a mother asked to reflect on her participation in the project:

It has been such a powerful experience. To talk about his name, to reflect upon the choice of his name. Like so many things we speed through only touching the surface as to why we do certain things - logical reasons for everything we do. Nothing about naming a child has anything to do with logic. It is all linked to our dreams and hopes about what this person can be...one would hope anyway. It’s a privilege to be in a position to raise a child and naming that child, I really believe sets their course. I am writing for and about my son, at the moment, and I wouldn’t have really looked at how we named him in more than a sentence or two, if I hadn’t done this. I’m really grateful I did it and felt the tears come up more than once. It really touched a deep part of me.

For further information about the project go to our website: <https://www.adoptionstories.org.uk/about-us>



Eve Makis is a novelist and lecturer in creative writing at Nottingham Trent University. She is the author of a co-written life-writing guide, *The Accidental Memoir*, published by Harper Collins in 2019.

Branching Paths

by Brad Gyori and James Pope

USING DIGITAL INTERACTIVE STORYTELLING TO ENCOURAGE MARGINALISED YOUNG PEOPLE TO ENGAGE WITH CREATIVE WRITING

ABSTRACT

This paper reports upon the Digital Interactive Storytelling in the Community (DISC) project conducted in the Faculty of Media and Communication at Bournemouth University, UK, in May/June 2022. This initiative was run in collaboration with Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service. The event was part of ongoing research and practice employing digital creative writing to stimulate collaboration and critical thinking for learners who might not normally have access to digital tools or feel motivated to try creative writing. In this iteration of our work, the participants had disengaged from learning and had committed minor offences leading to court orders or cautions. Our project enabled them to write, design and produce a digital interactive narrative and publish it online. This paper outlines the process employed to implement and evaluate their creative and analytical work. It also references and builds on the scholarship underpinning our ongoing participatory research. We analyse the completed work and the participants' reactions to the project, identifying five key pedagogic strategies that may aid other educators designing and running similar collaborative learning initiatives. They are: *de-risking autonomy, flexible scaffolding, modular instruction, behaviour modeling, and role reinforcement*. We discuss each of these proposed best and consider how they may enhance the engagement of previously disengaged learners.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on a community-based project undertaken by the authors and other members of the Faculty of Media and Communication at Bournemouth University (BU) in May/June 2022, in collaboration with the Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service (DCYJS). The project builds on previous community-based events, which we call Digital Interactive Storytelling in the Community (DISC), involving young people who typically might not have access to digital tools or feel motivated to try creative writing (Gyori & Pope 2019,

2021). Our belief, substantiated by previous projects, is that creative writing using digital tools can be stimulating, engaging, and often inspiring for reluctant and/or diffident learners. In this case, the participants were teens under the supervision of DCYJS, subject to court orders or police cautions for minor offences. We and DCYJS hoped the project would spur enhanced self-esteem and encourage a return to education. Drawing on Participant-Centred Learning techniques (Barnes, M. 2013, McCombs, B.L. 2006, Robinson, V. 2011), we supported them to design and produce an interactive digital narrative and then publish it online. This narrative featured many types of media including written text, film, sound, and photography.

The finished narrative can be experienced at: <https://genarrator.org/view/b236rksn6olygbgc>

The overarching aim for this and the previous iterations of the DISC is to offer digital-interactive storytelling to a diverse community of learners, as a means of creative expression and critical engagement. Our research questions were:

1. How can we ensure effective experiential learning occurs when participants are creating interactive stories?
2. How do participants learn from each other and from mentors when creating interactive stories?

From its start in 2016, this scheme set out to explore modes of student-centred learning that could empower participants to take charge of the creative process. The learning process we have designed affords participants a high degree of agency in the collaborative creative process. It allows participants to operate within the affordances and constraints of a dynamic, semi-structured learning experience that strives to effectively capitalise on their interests, while challenging them to develop new competencies and build on established skills. This process helps to foster the confidence of

participants, enhancing their ability to communicate effectively and work co-operatively with others.

For each iteration, we have chosen to work with learners who are disadvantaged or reticent in some respect: at-risk and/or unemployed teens; secondary school students with little interest in Higher Education; and young offenders. We have been pleased to discover that participants tend to respond well to our non-traditional learning design.

While we have learned a great deal about project participants and how best to offer them rewarding experiences, we have also been highly concerned with the learning process itself. Specifically, we are interested in innovating and refining strategies for experiential learning in the context of co-creating digital interactive stories. We hope that some of these strategies will be of interest to other educators who would like to achieve similar results with disenfranchised and otherwise indifferent learners.

Creating interactive narratives can encourage participants to think analytically about the consequences of pivotal life-choices. Interactive storytelling features many cause and effect relationships. A story-player is offered a series of options. Upon picking one, she is directed down a path toward an outcome tied to that choice. In the case of our 2022 DISC, we were working with a group of young offenders, who chose to focus on the topic of bullying. The young men participating in this co-creation activity drew upon personal experiences to craft a narrative that allowed them to think through potential pro-social and anti-social responses to this type of harassment.

Below, we describe and analyse our latest DISC and refer to the scholarship underpinning this work and its production. We also provide evidence, in the form of DCYJS education officer Sarah Preece's report on the project, of the participants' reactions to their involvement in the DISC. We organise our discussion around some of the learning strategies that have emerged through our work. And finally, we offer some tentative conclusions around the effectiveness of our approach in engaging this group of participants of varying abilities and attitudes and suggest opportunities for further project development.

2. BACKGROUND

Based on previous successful digital storytelling events, and related research and pedagogy (Pope 2006; 2009a; 2009b; 2010; 2013a; 2017), the software platform Genarrator was used here to build the narrative. The DISC also exploits Gyori's experience as a television writer-producer, education scholar, and interactive story practitioner (Gyori, 2013; Gyori 2016; Gyori & Charles 2017; Gyori 2019).

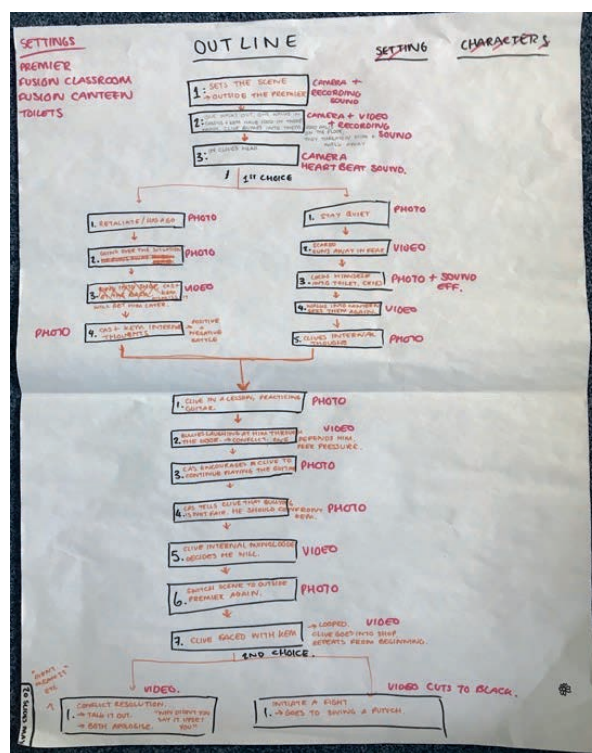
Participants in previous iterations of DISC created stories that focused on areas relevant to their lived experiences. In 2016, a group of at-risk teens affiliated with the AIM (Assessment/Intervention/Moving on) Project focused

on internet "catfishing." Two iterations at the Bishop of Winchester Academy (2018 & 2019) allowed secondary school students to think through a variety of complex topics including racism in sport, domestic violence, sea pollution, and mental health issues (see Gyori and Pope 2019, 2021).

3. PROCEDURE

Working with vulnerable and marginalised participants presents a variety of ethical challenges. For the 2022 DISC project with the young offenders, we chose to work on Bournemouth University's Talbot campus, in the Faculty of Media and Communication, for the first time. It took place over six days, split across two working weeks. We designed the entire structure of this iteration in collaboration with the DCYJS staff who felt that a full week without a weekend break might prove too demanding for the participants. DCYJS felt that the university environment, along with the use of professional media studios and equipment, would be a positive motivating factor for the participants. We followed our institution's ethical guidelines, submitted risk assessments, and were supported by DCYJS case workers throughout. Those same case workers were the most outspoken advocates of the project, frequently remarking on the enthusiasm of the participants engaging in the collaborative process. Also, following their advice and building on our previous experience, each day was organised around specific tasks, with breaks for coffee and lunch in the main refectory building. Here is the day-by-day structure:

Day One: introduction to the project, the nature of digital interactive storytelling, story ideas, and story plotting. This includes the need to make a story map (Fig. 1) which is used as the template for building an interactive narrative with branching paths.



Day Two: refine story map (Fig. 2); begin filming and photography on campus

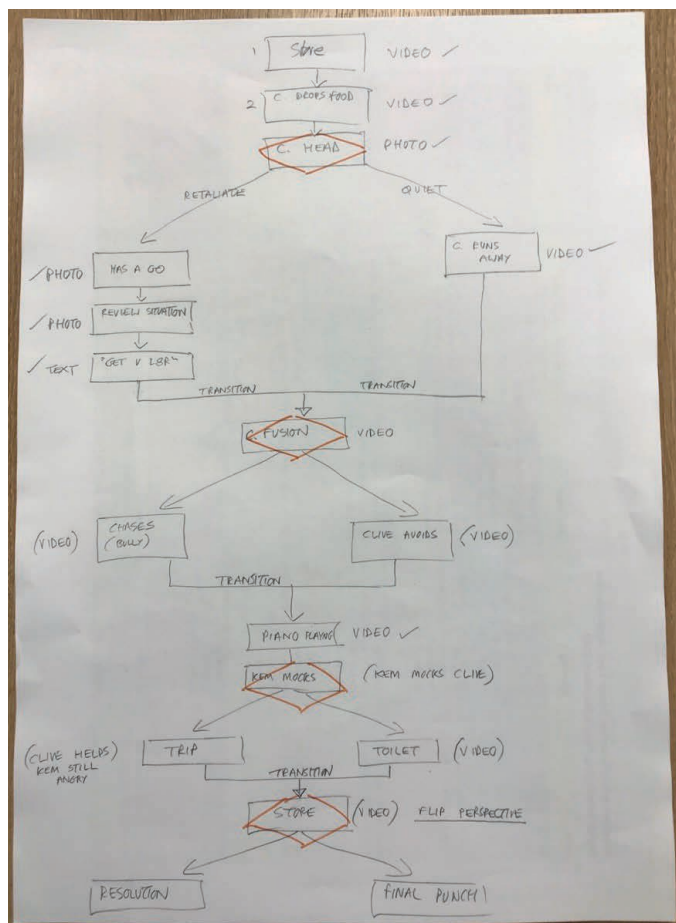


Figure 2: Day Two refined map

Day Three: filming and sound recording, including sourcing and editing copyright-free sound effects.

Day Four: finish filming and sound work. Post-production editing. Begin to build the narrative in Genarrator.

Day Five: complete Genarrator build and test the working narrative.

Day Six: presentation of the working narrative to families, faculty staff, and DCYJS staff.

4. METHODOLOGY

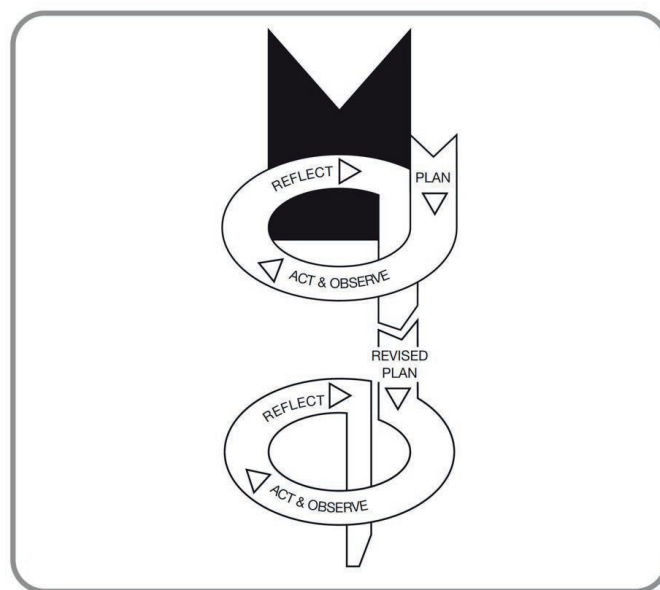
The Project Participants

The participants were all male, aged 14 to 17, who we will call by the pseudonyms Ben, Jay, and Marcus. These young men were selected by DCYJS who felt they would cope with the structure and demands of what was quite an intense working period. The case workers also felt participants had a good rapport with one another and were open to the idea of working on a sustained collaborative project. We found this reassuring as the three proposed participants were subject to court orders or police cautions: "When out in the community, the boys had committed offences where they were in places they should not have been, or influenced by others, behaving unsafe or even dangerously" (Preece, n.p).

The project team was composed of James Pope (project co-ordinator, and scripting), Brad Gyori (scripting and video), Saeed Rashid (photography), and Jason Hallett (sound). We also recruited two final-year undergraduates from the faculty, Megan Caswell and Emma Keeley, students who had experience of using Genarrator to make interactive narratives. These two acted as mentors and production assistants throughout the project. We have found that including younger adults helps to create a sense of team cohesion and aspiration as the young participants relate more easily to them (Gyori & Pope 2021). Project supervision and overseeing care of the three participants was provided by DCYJS education officer Sarah Preece and careers advisor Kirsty Reed.

Action research

We employ an Action Research approach (Koshy 2005; McNiff 2013) to note and assess the strengths and weaknesses of each project.



The Action Research "spiral" (Koshy 2005: 5)

Action Research has been chosen as an underpinning model for all our DISC events because it offers a practicable and valid framework for the kind of situations we work in, where the realities of the event location and the abilities and sensitivities of the participants must be central to our thinking and planning.

Action Research in Practice

Because it is easily adapted to collaborative projects, we opted for the Action Research model suggested by McNiff (2013). We quote McNiff's (p.105) key stages below. See Gyori and Pope (2021) for further detail of this approach during previous projects.

We review our current practice.

Identify an aspect we wish to investigate.

Ask focused questions about how we can investigate it.

- Imagine a way forwards.
- Try it out and take stock of what happens.
- Modify our plan in light of what we have found and continue with the action.

- Evaluate the modified action.
- Reconsider what we are doing in light of the evaluation.
- Proceed with a new action–reflection cycle.

Participant-Centred Learning

From the outset, the DISC was conceived as a participant-centred learning initiative. Therefore, the key insights that have emerged all reflect a pedagogic approach that promotes autonomy, critical thinking, and high levels of engagement (Barnes, M. 2013, McCombs, B.L. 2006, Robinson, V. 2011). We considered how the learning design influenced participants at the level of the individual (Gee 2003; Yelland and Masters 2005), and the team (Bandura 1971; Schüler 2007). We considered other comparable projects in the field (Botfield et al 2018; Heron and Steckley 2018; Kindon et al 2010; Sadik, A., 2008).

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

De-risking Autonomy

A student-centred approach to teaching involves allowing participants to help design their own learning process (Yelland and Masters 2005). However, the young offenders co-creating this interactive story had been known to struggle with issues of social interaction and behavioural regulation. We wanted them to take ownership of the project but to do so in a way that felt safe and productive for all participants and the learning facilitators as well. This meant assuring the participants, especially in the initial stages, that they were welcome to suggest ideas and offer critiques in a safe setting where their imaginations would be given free reign. We refer to this approach as “de-risking autonomy.”

To begin with, no idea, however impractical, was automatically dismissed. Project leader Jim Pope challenged the participants to suggest stories set in imaginary worlds, far off locations or different historical eras. After all, with some images drawn by the participants or selected off the Internet, they could place their narrative in any time or place they could imagine. This type of blue-sky brainstorming allowed the students to relax a bit and realise they were free to take creative risks.

Flexible Scaffolding

When participants are well immersed in a passion-driven process of problem solving they forget they are acquiring skills and forming new knowledge (Dewey 1893). This is the experiential dimension of learner-centred education. Perhaps paradoxically, for participants to feel free to experiment and innovate, they first need a full understanding of the rules of engagement, and these rules must be clear and consistent, an approach that Bruner (2006) identified as “instructional scaffolding.” Scaffolding is the educational support necessary to effectively guide learner-centred learning.

When conducting this project, we noticed the participants were very easily distracted: Jay would sometimes appear

to be so tired that he could barely keep his eyes open; although very keen and often highly attentive, Marcus would suddenly walk off to explore a faculty building; Ben was also often very tired, but was the most focused, though his concentration could easily be disturbed by Jay, who would begin a conversation or find something of interest on his mobile phone.

Because of these challenges, it was necessary to occasionally break up the overt instruction with elements of brainstorming, or to find ways to present some of the teaching during the actual production process, while continually reinforcing the project’s end-goal and frequently summing up what had been accomplished and what was next to be done.

At the start of each day the team reviewed what had been achieved up to that point. We then set clear goals for the day to come. This type of steady, constant reinforcement provided the kind of guidance the participants needed to stay on track.

We always met at the Fusion building, for an expected and relaxed start to the day and Jim met us and briefed the boys on what to expect that day. This helped the boys as we have found in previous projects elsewhere, that not knowing what is happening next can prompt them to become unsettled and lose interest. That didn’t happen here (Preece, 2022 n.p.).

Modular Instruction

Experiential learning involves the delicate interplay of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Designing learning experiences based on extrinsic motivation involves creating clear rewards and penalties related to learning requirements. On the other hand, designing learning experiences based on intrinsic motivation involves creating opportunities for participants to gain new forms of mastery which they will want to demonstrate (Deci 1971).

For this iteration of the DISC project the participants were not formally required to attend each day. The experience was something DCYJS and BU were offering to help fulfil certain aspects of their supervision period. Although participation was not mandatory, we were gratified that all three young men stayed the course, and for the presentation event came in their best clothes and were clearly pleased to see their work presented to BU staff and students on the big screen in the faculty theatre. The DCYJS staff were impressed by this positive outcome:

all boys attended every day, even despite some difficulties in their personal lives and influence of peers. They arrived tired on some days, but still turned up and made the effort. They have previously had poor school attendance, or for two, not been in any education, employment or training, so this was a significant, positive step. They all persevered with the project at each step (Preece 2022).

We found that negative behaviours were more likely to result when participants were not fully employed in ways they found stimulating. For example, during Day

One, which was primarily focused on devising the story (see Fig 1), the participants were initially quiet and not offering up ideas.

Participants are not merely controlled by the learning environment; they also help to constitute it (Bandura 1976). Therefore, participants must be properly supported and carefully guided through the learning process.

When designing the instructional components of this iteration, we drew on some of our past learnings (Gyori and Pope 2021). When designing the various iterations of DISC we have found that it is important to achieve the right balance between such structural interventions and the more free-form creative brain storming sessions. For instance, rather than always front-loading large amounts of overt instruction, we have found that basic content knowledge is often more easily and effectively absorbed when it is delivered just in time and on demand as education reform advocate James Gee advises (2003). This accomplishes two things. One: the overt instruction is parsed into smaller, more digestible packets, and two: it is shared when students are highly receptive, seeking the solution to a problem that are actively seeking to solve.

This modular approach meant we could pulse in with the right amount of instruction at the appropriate moment rather than front-loading a lot of lecture-like guidance that might have caused the participants to disengage. This helped the participants stay interested and active throughout the production process. It was also observed that:

lectures on photography and film were slightly longer than many usually sit for, but Saeed and Brad pitched it just right, and the boys sat well. Even when one appeared to lose focus, he didn't overtly show this, whereas in other settings, if he is not interested, he would walk out or tell the adult/s to f-off. That never happened during the project. The boys took on board what was said and were swiftly led into practical so they could apply what they had been taught and keep active (Preece, 2022 n.p.).

Following classroom-based instruction, we always moved directly to practical work. This allowed the participants to immediately apply concepts they had been introduced to moments earlier. As the learning process remained active, the participants remained engaged. According to the DCYJS: "The boys took turns equally and encouraged each other to try. When more familiar with what was needed for editing, they were more keen to take part." (Preece, 2022 n.p.).

Behavior Modeling

Participants are often most invested in the learning process when working alongside others, sharing insights and skills. This allows them to acquire knowledge and skills that can later be deployed without the support of others (Vygotsky 1986).

Each iteration of the DISC has had a strong social learning dimension, because each member of the participant group contributes to the digital narrative

being created, offering an opportunity for our teaching team to establish what Lave and Wenger call a "community of practice" (1991: 22). One aspect of our approach is to work alongside the participants every step of the way, which helped create a sense of common purpose.

We all ate together at the same table or nearby tables. The lecturers and student technicians joined lunch and chatted with them, which was a great and simple way to build a trusting relationship with the boys. It reinforced being part of a team throughout and always returned without needing to be chased (Preece, 2022 n.p.).

The learning community developed as the project progressed:

[there was] a strong sense of teamwork in the practical work, editing decisions and even sharing their ear pods or offering a chip at lunchtime... [Ben] was able to defer some of his leadership duties and would often say "we should ask the others" or "it's a team decision", which helped him to think of others and moderate his own behaviour...

... the boys attended every day. They were often tired, but still showed up. If running late, one would call the other and make sure they arrived, showing good teamwork and how they valued the project, relying on each other to each play their part. (Preece 2022 n.p.).

Another social dimension of the DISC is Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (1978: 86), noted also by Heron and Steckley (2018). According to this view, effective education experiences challenge learners to reach beyond their present abilities (Bandura, 1994). Basawapatna et al (2013: 12) have combined the concepts of flow (Csikszentmihályi 1990) and the zone of proximal development, coining the concept of "the zone of proximal flow". This occurs during a social learning process when a whole team of participants achieve a simultaneous state of heightened engagement.

Increasing engagement and satisfaction was observed as the participants learned from the project mentors and each other:

The boys all focused well and kept going until they got the task done. This part showed the best engagement and creative/listening skills. Given that they have experienced difficult and disrupted education, not having positive relationships with all their former educators, they adapted and showed respect to the lecturers and accepted challenge or being asked to repeat something. The beaming smile on their faces when they came out of the [sound] booth to sit with Jason, was genuine and showed they really had fun (Preece, 2022 n.p.).

Role Reinforcement

Encouraging the participants to choose what roles they would perform helped them feel more in charge of the learning process and thus more invested in its outcomes.

Jay, despite his sometimes-apatetic responses to prompts and questions when in the classroom briefing, he was keen to use the video camera, and during the shooting was visibly more involved and engrossed. He became the director of the project, a role he came to relish as he thought up ideas for framing shots and began making suggestions for dramatic blocking, helping the actors craft their performances.

Marcus wanted to be on-camera and was enthusiastic throughout, becoming the lead actor. He took ownership of this role by suggesting character motivations that informed specific scenes and experimenting with different performance styles, captured in the silent footage and still images featured in the final interactive narrative.

Ben was willing to be featured on camera but didn't want his face to be recognisable. We needed an antagonist to appear opposite Marcus so we asked Ben to suggest how this could be accomplished. After some careful consideration he said he would be willing to be filmed from behind and the camera could also show extreme close ups of his eyes, resulting in a menacing image that the team eventually picked as for the iconic title still for their completed project. By thinking through this challenge, Ben took on an additional role; and as the project continued to develop, he began to distinguish himself as its principal scriptwriter, coming up with many creative solutions for narrative dilemmas.

According to the DCYJS staff the participants found their production roles highly stimulating:

While filming, it was clear they had a positive attitude and status holding the kit or acting, and their identity was about this... It brought out their creativity and ability to achieve something. I could see them engaged in the task fully, particularly the practical side. They were mindful of other students/staff passing by to make sure they weren't in their way, showing respect for the public. Overall, they were able to adapt to the University environment and etiquette well, be successful as a team, and also got a lot out of it as individuals (Preece 2022 n.p.).

5. CONCLUSIONS

This section reflects on our initial research questions, tying them to the five proposed pedagogic strategies and suggesting some areas for additional research. All of this is informed by our belief that the process of designing interactive stories is a great way to create opportunities for positive learning outcomes and interactions.

1. *How can we ensure that effective experiential learning occurs when participants are creating interactive stories?*

As in all our previous DISC iterations, participants in the summer of 2022 were empowered to experiment and innovate (de-risking autonomy). This meant our guidelines had to be clear and consistent, yet our approach had to be agile (flexible scaffolding). When interest waned in any aspect of the production process,

we deployed strategies to reinvigorate the participants and help keep them on track (modular instruction). The pre-production writing and preparation time offered was vital for the participants to come to terms with the concept of interactive stories, practicalities of production, and to develop their own story ideas. These sessions also provided ample opportunities for our learning facilitators to lead by example (behavior modeling). We also offered opportunities for the participants to shine as they took on various pivotal roles, capitalising on the power of intrinsic motivation to enhance engagement. Once the participants had selected their roles, we were able to guide them by asking key questions related to their chosen professional personae (role reinforcement).

2. *How do participants learn from each other and from mentors when creating interactive stories?*

The creation of a "community of practice" (Lave and Wenger 1991: 122) seems to us to be of central importance if a demanding project is to be completed on time and with a successful end-product. What was particularly encouraging to see was that young men who had been sanctioned for anti-social behaviour were finding pro-social ways to collaborate on a creative project. This required them to work cooperatively toward a common goal, to support each other and to value their own unique skill sets:

All the boys grew in confidence as they became more familiar with the task and spoke up with ideas or challenged others appropriately if they disagreed. They also started to share some humour with [the] adults but were never rude (Preece, 2022 n.p.).

A Note on Impact

Creative writing educators undertaking participatory research of all kinds are naturally concerned that their work has an impact, in terms of an enjoyable process for the participants, and a product which is satisfying for both participants and researchers (who themselves are creative writers, filmmakers, sound engineers, and photographers in the DISC projects). Resourcing projects of this kind is almost always a first consideration, and impact is a key criterion for most funding bodies, so impact — however it is defined — has to be evidenced. These notes from Sarah Preece provide some indications:

Towards the end, Jay asked "do the Uni do scholarships?", showing he had that spark, and was inspired. (Preece 2022 n.p.).

[Marcus] spoke to one of the [BU] students about TEFL qualifications, as he is keen on this, so this was an opportunity to ask questions (Preece 2022 n.p.)

While certainly encouraging, we view this kind of feedback as an area for improvement. Follow-up is difficult, as the young men move on from DCYJS care and further contact is likely to be very limited. In future iterations we plan to speak to BU administrative staff and our project partners about tying our outcomes into, for example, widening participation goals.

An additional area where our insight into impact could

be more robust would be more effectively debriefing participants. We had Ben, Jay and Marcus fill out surveys before and after participating in the project, but their responses were rather cursory and vague, a more focused debriefing would have been a better way to capture detailed information about their first-hand experiences. That said, informal exchanges with the participants and their reaction to the finished project suggest they found the experience a highly positive form of learning:

[Jay] said at the end, that it was strange, but he is starting to get a few hours sleep at night now. He previously had a very erratic sleeping pattern and started the project with no sleep at night. We talked about how his brain has been so active and he said it has been a great opportunity, shook Jim's hand and asked about doing [a narrative] on his own soon. (Preece 2022 n.p.)

In terms of longer-term impact that the DISC might engender, longitudinal studies will be required; but in the short term, we consider such projects a constructive way of connecting a university to the local community. We also believe the proposed pedagogic strategies (*de-risking autonomy, flexible scaffolding, modular instruction, behavior modeling, and role reinforcement*) are highly effective tools that other educators working on collaborative learning projects will find useful. Finally, after designing multiple iterations of DISC, we are more convinced than ever that creating interactive stories is a fantastic way of helping previously disengaged learners change course and move onto more productive life-paths.

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Dr Brad Gyori is Principal Academic in Digital Storytelling at Bournemouth University, UK. An American writer, director and designer with a background in TV production, he is the programme leader for the MA in Creative Writing and Publishing. He also teaches journalism participants how to make interactive documentaries. Gyori has worked as a writer-producer for such networks as MTV, VH1, E!, FX and HBO. He was the head writer of the Emmy winning series *Talk Soup*. His theatrical works have been presented by Steppenwolf theatre, Phoenix Theatre and Bournemouth Emerging Arts Fringe. His short fiction has been published in *Mystery Tribune*, *No Parties Magazine*, *Café Irreal*, *The Ghost Story*, and the *Museum Journal*. He is co-director of the media arts conglomerate *Doppelgänger Productions*.



Dr James Pope is Principal Academic in English and Communication at Bournemouth University, UK. As well as several publications around his research into readers' reactions to digital fiction, James has also published six novels for children and teenagers. His interests are: how digital media are changing narrative forms, and reading and writing practices; the teaching of creative writing, particularly in digital media environments; and children's literature. He is the co-founder and, from 2010 to 2021, director of the annual international [New Media Writing Prize](#). He created [Genarrator](#), an online digital storytelling tool, currently hosting over 1200 interactive digital narratives. He co-edited *Texts of Discomfort*, a collection of essays on the practice of interactive digital storytelling (2021 Carnegie-Mellon Press).

Making use of Reproductions for Creative Writing at a Distance

by Patrick Wright

My thoughts for this article have emerged out of my recently completed PhD in Creative Writing: *Exit Strategy: Ekphrasis through the Lens of the Abstract and the Formless* (Open University 2023). Here I was grappling with the problem of how to write a poem in response to an artwork such as Mark Rothko's *Black on Maroon* (1958): a painting that is little more than colour. While there is much to say about the ekphrastic modes I have developed with this task in mind, for now I would like to focus on one key debate: immediacy versus representation. Is there particular value for creative writers in capturing an immediate experience of an artwork (while in a gallery, for instance)? Is it useful in this context to think in terms of Walter Benjamin's notion of the "aura"? If though we are working with a reproduction, is something lost? If so, how significant is this loss? Is there likewise value in re-visiting the image later, perhaps at home, using Google Images or a postcard? A deeper question might be: Do we have less access to the real (the physical or material substance of the work)? Or can we have *any* access to it? Can we ever really see what is there? Some postmodern theory suggests we only have representation: various kinds of mediation or lenses through which to see the image.

Initially, and following a tradition of site-specific ekphrasis (making a poem alongside a picture), I spent time in galleries and museums. Often, I would arrange private viewings, working in the research room or in the holdings. Barbara Fischer in *Museum Mediations* extols American poetry that locates itself self-consciously in the museum, taking in the viewing experience and everything around the work, and poets who study the effect of their site-specificity on their interactions (Fischer 2007). This was true at first: I captured what I felt to be the immediacy or aura of the image, and other details such as the texture or smell of the paint. Moreover, I included the paratext, such as blurbs or descriptions of the artwork, the speech of gallery staff or visitors, and so on. Messy first drafts were often the result, and a sense (perhaps even the *illusion*) of a direct connection with my object.

However, we then had the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. My practice-based research had to shift in terms of methodology. Physical travel was restricted, and I had to rely on reproductions, online images, and virtual gallery tours as prompts for my poems.

After following the tradition noted by Fischer, while acknowledging the loss of sensory input, my use of reproductions does not, as I see it, result in reduced experience or an inferior poem. Instead, I think of reproductions as stimulating in other ways.

Working within a new set of constraints and new technologies, away from first-hand viewings, I began to question the idea of immediacy or authenticity in creative practice. David Kinloch refers to how poets often envy a perceived immediacy or access to the real that is inherent in the visual arts (Kinloch 2010). Frank O'Hara's poem "Why I Am Not a Painter" comes to mind, where the idea of immediacy is initially entertained, only to be later contested (O'Hara 2005 [1957]: 112). My attitude to this, and how ekphrasis is already one step removed from the artwork, has been to embrace the irreconcilability of word and image; the idea that the relationship between the visual and the verbal is, as Michel Foucault understood, "infinite" (Foucault 2002 [1966]: 10). I also celebrate the "death of the author" and how a poem can depart from its starting point.

Imaginary Museum

On this Sunday autumnal morning
I arrange a set of postcards on the table's
surface—all Turners from the 1840s
with billowing waves and detonating suns.

I juxtapose them in ways entirely my own—
I rotate them in the style of a gyre:
the ships and shorelines disappearing
till all that's left is one big creation myth—

like how once everything we know
was crammed inside the size of a dice.
All this at some remove from the Clore
with its taut ropes and exclusion zones.

Under my hands I see the paint sail
outwards and into the grain—the edges
fizzling away and atmospheres escaping
into the larger lozenge: the place of prayer.

Not only is it obvious that our age of mechanical reproduction and the Internet brings images to the viewer, with the pandemic, and issues such as illness, disability, and the cost of living, it is more important than ever to think about ways in which art can be appreciated from a distance and/or creatively responded to. This is also one aspect of my role at the Open University: teaching skills associated with image analysis in virtual learning environments. The latter includes Adobe Connect rooms, where students are asked to examine reproductions

Using reproductions is supported by Andrew Miller's observation that "such modern ekphrases as William Carlos Williams's 'Pictures of Brueghel' and W.H. Auden's 'Musée des Beaux Arts' were written by way of photographic reproductions." Miller questions the cult of authenticity in Western art and proposes that most famous modern ekphrases are panegyrics of what Benjamin saw as the aura of traditional art (Miller 2012).

Moving away from authenticity or fidelity to an artwork, ekphrasis (or what is often thought of by contemporary writers more in terms of a response or re-mediation) is a practice that can be multi-modal, nuanced, and involve only a tenuous link between word and image. Recognising this, I also ask: Can we re-discover a substitute aura through digital technologies? If so, what forms can this take?

Within this context we might think of André Malraux's concept of the imaginary museum: how in a culture of images, art is now potentially more accessible to a diverse public, and how the museum is, to some extent, internalised in our imagination, where we are able to view and curate images in a space outside institutional walls and the conventional white cube environment (Malraux 1949). One poem I wrote at this time, emblematic of this perspective, is "Imaginary Museum":

(in the subject area of Art History, for example); or, in Creative Writing, they are sometimes using online images as creative prompts.

The genre of place writing also comes to mind: ekphrasis as a kind of place writing. So, we might ask: What are the features and considerations of place writing in a museum or gallery? I have written on the theme of surveillance, for example, in this kind of place; attention span (when and how we look at images); and a sense of

disorientation. Other questions might be: What happens to a place when we write of it remotely? To what extent can we “travel” in our imaginations? Do we need to visit a place, or can we use reproductions? Again, I wonder what is lost, in, say, writing through a postcard of Perranporth, Cornwall (a special place for me), instead of being there. Might it be the case that there is a greater reliance on the visual sense, rather than other senses?

My thoughts on these ideas have been supported by “A Virtual Island Journey”: a relatively recent creative-critical article by Joe Moran (published in the journal, *Cultural Geographies*). Here, Moran explicitly refers to making use of digital technologies during lockdown. He says (with reference to the island of Scattery, in the mouth of the Shannon, west Clare, Ireland): “My account of the island has been assembled piecemeal from memories of previous visits, day-dreams, family recollections, online browsing and the historical fragments I can pick up from the fairly scant literature on the island” (Moran 2022: 116). He also remarks that a basic insight of place writing is that writing itself is generative and part of the process

of discovering a place. It occurred to me that I had a similar approach to images during my own experience of lockdown.

Kris Lackey coined the term “vertical travel” to refer to patient and prolonged attention to a place, in contrast to the horizontal journey through space in classic travel writing (Lackey 1997: 53). Michael Cronin sees vertical travel as “travell[ing] down into the particulars of place either in space or in time” (Cronin 2000: 19). There is also a tradition of armchair travel, represented by Bernd Stiegler’s *Travelling in Place* (Stiegler 2013). Each of these ideas might be considered in relation to ongoing debates about the relationship between writing, landscape, mobility, and disability. To my mind, a key thinker in these discussions is the poet and creative non-fiction writer, Polly Atkin.

Another poem I have written is based on Cornelia Parker’s installation *Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View*. Again, this is with the use of reproductions (from the Tate website viewed on my iPhone):

An Exploded View

Alongside Cornelia Parker

			hinged
brackets	spin		in a vortex
still	as a supernova		remnant
pine-lap panels	stripped		by wasps
hung	on fishing wires		just because
if I learn		to love	the bomb
perhaps	it will look		like this
fixed	in a millisecond		like smiles
in jpegs	on		external drives
		at my centre is a single lightbulb	
now	a sky-dance		of swallows
or galaxies	just		fly apart
your toys	tools		left behind clothes
your LPs	all screaming		let me go

I saw this kind of screen (my iPhone) as a way of viewing specific artworks (those I could not access in the flesh); but I also looked at online exhibitions and spent more time with prints from books and exhibition catalogues. This placed an extra burden on my active imagination. I saw Parker's installation was even more emphatically "fixed" (I write, "in a millisecond") by the images I worked with on my screen: providing extra layers of mediation. In addition to an exercise in ekphrasis, or what might be seen as a formal experiment, I was led to think of my experience of personal loss. *Cold Dark Matter* is compared, as a result, to "smiles / in jpegs on external drives", where the "real", or what seems to be authentic or have auratic value, is "at my centre ... / a single / lightbulb."

Without seeing Parker's artwork first-hand, I began by recalling the reproductions I had studied in a lecture theatre many years ago as an Art History student. My visualization of her shed, frozen in time, led to an image in my mind's eye of how my poem might look. Words were then, analogously, "exploded" around the page. Google Images offered other views of the installation under different lighting. I was also aware that the device through which I looked made the image subject to chance reflections. The technology (with its filters and frustrations) becomes part of what I write about, along with my surroundings ("a sky-dance of swallows").

My most recent implementation of the concerns and practices I have set out here is a project I am currently developing with Manchester Museum. What I have in mind is a short course, like ones I have facilitated before, where I encourage participants to write about artefacts in the museum. In the past, we have done this on site. This time, however, I think it would be interesting to have an online course, providing access to the museum for those who are unable to visit in person (due to disability or the prohibitive cost of travelling, for instance). With this course I will be able to test ideas I have already begun to delineate: creative writing in response to artworks and reproductions; "travelling" to a place through the mind's eye; curating an imaginary exhibition (from a distance), and so on. I would also like this course to result in output: a publication, for example, or a display of creative writing within the museum, juxtaposed with the object(s) that were its inspiration.

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Patrick Wright has a poetry collection, *Full Sight of Her (Eyewear)*, which was nominated for the John Pollard Prize. He has also been twice shortlisted for the Bridport Prize. His poems have appeared in *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The North*, *Southword*, *Agenda*, *Wasafiri*, *London Magazine*, and *The Reader*. He teaches English Literature and Creative Writing at the Open University.

REVIEWS

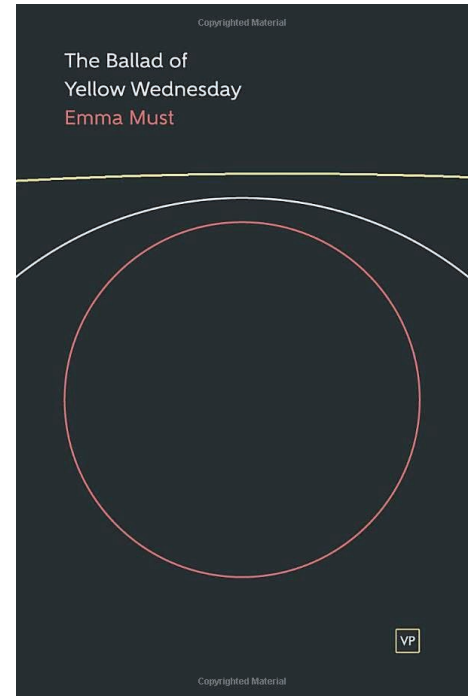
The Ballad of Yellow Wednesday

Emma Must

Valley Press, 2022

ISBN 978-1-915606-04-4

102 pages, paperback, £10.99



In her preface, Must writes that 'Twyford Down... a mile-long hill of chalk in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty... stood in the way of the 'missing link' of the M3 motorway, designed to shave seven minutes off the journey between Southampton and London'. As context for these shaved minutes, Must exposes layers of the past in 'Chalk, with Flints' revealing the fossilised consequences of 'phytoplankton discarding their skeletons in a warm shelf sea, quietly as snow'. In 'Bloodstone Copse', an innocent 'little coppice, refuge for earthstars, toothwort, violets' accedes to the 'blood-blotched stones' of Viking terror. The natural world is nimbly depicted and historical changes to the landscape are acknowledged (such as the presaging scars of Roman trackways), but, perhaps more importantly, Must also delves into her own past to when, as a young woman, she fled her work at Winchester Library to join the protest against the scheme.

There is almost a sense in which the earlier poems are the stronger ones of the collection, as though the precursor, like anticipation, has more impact. 'Bloodstone Copse' gets straight to the point:

'I wear Twyford as a wound.

My mouth is raw. I am open for salvation.'

The choice of words is electrifying; you can almost taste the words. The poetical structure is simple but effective, presaging the tumultuous protest while providing vital snippets of the author's early life. In Bourne, the fluidity of the repeated 'Which is a tribute to' establishes the way in which everything is interrelated. She tells us that in the Brownies,

'I earned my Writer Badge after a tussle

over whether 'teasel' was a word.

I knew it was: I'd seen them by the river.'

So, from a young age language and nature mattered to her and she has spent most of her life perfecting her skills; the last words of the poem are:

‘And beyond it I saw

the end of a green hill turned white.’

After joining the protests, the author was incarcerated in Holloway Prison as one of the ‘Twyford Seven’. The Twyford Protests are acknowledged to have caused a major shift in green attitudes, and this book, though thirty years in the making, was worth waiting for.

In the titular poem ‘The Ballad of Yellow Wednesday’, road workers have ‘yellow plastic souls’, thinking only of money and not of human loss. Though one-sided, it brings to the fore what we have lost, and what the earth stands to lose in the near future if politicians don’t act quickly. There will always be ‘green imaginations’, as the poem says, but ‘as earth’s dark shutters close over the moon’, the shutters will close over the earth if we don’t act fast.

In ‘Inspection of One’s Person’, the final line is ironic:

‘You learn not to ask ‘What are you in for?’’

The next poem is actually called ‘What She Was In For’ and in it, Must details the petty reasons that some people are doing time.

In ‘Correspondence 1’, she says:

‘I’ve done my time learning how to write back.

I’m rereading what’s inside these fat packets

after twenty-five years’

The lived experience makes the poems more compelling and the letter from her Auntie Marjorie says: ‘a lovely country, we must keep it green and free.’

‘Statement’, ‘Sentence’ and ‘Appeal’ seemingly transcribe court proceedings and serve as shocking reminders of how the full weight of the law was used against a group of people trying to protect the landscape that inspired Keats to write ‘To Autumn’.

The final poem, ‘Shale Spindle Whorl’, is shaped in the form of a spindle and builds to a crescendo where one feels ‘the weight of the world’, referring to the hanging of Nigerian environmental activist and writer, Ken Saro-Wiwa. A poignant and salutary ending.

In the end, time didn’t allow me to see Twyford Down for myself or to witness the battle ground, but I felt ashamed to have even considered travelling across it on the M3. It’s all here in the book of course: ‘Waves of cars and lorries. Folds. The hum the hum the hum the hum’ (‘Ground Truth’). Photographs of the protests and excavation are included in the Notes and provide an interesting counterpoint to Emma Must’s poems.

Review by Lisa Samson

Lisa Samson writes both fiction and non-fiction. She is the author of *Epitaph for the Ash: in search of recovery and renewal* (4th Estate 2018) and is currently writing a novel. A former Senior Lecturer of Academic English at Leeds Beckett University, Lisa lives in Harrogate with her husband and loves walking in the Dales.

The Thirteenth Angel

Philip Gross

Bloodaxe Books

ISBN 978-1-78037-635-6

paperback, £12



We open this, Philip Gross's 27th poetry collection, a Poetry Book Society Recommendation and shortlisted for this year's TS Eliot Prize (which he won in 2009 with *The Water Table*) with an inevitable sense of expectation. And in spite of the poet's modest insistence (in a recording made for the Prize website, before the winner, Anthony Joseph, was announced) that the book offers no 'message' for humanity, we somehow hope that Gross's probing, mischievous intellect, sent out on a mission, mostly during lockdown, to locate one, might have reeled something in.

The book's title suggests a trajectory for that mission—in *The Book of Enoch*, an ancient Hebrew apocalyptic religious text, 'the thirteenth angel' is Bezaliel (meaning 'shadow of God'), one of the 200 angels that fell from heaven—while the 11-page opening poem, *Nocturne: The Information*, gives us its roadmap: here, then repeatedly through the collection, we have light and dark; shadows; parallels; journeying; the potential to fall, and, glimpsed with playful letter-shuffling from obscure 'angles', things which may, or may not, be 'angels'. The starting point, in that first poem, is a grim, "Want it now" view of modern life: the speaker, peering at sleepless, nocturnal London from a third-floor window, points out "the relish of spice / and charred meat", "a mess of bin sacks", "deserts / of digital light". There are references to Dante's *Inferno*, ("The underworld's arranged / not in circles but parallel"), TS Eliot's *The Waste Land* (we glimpse, through "Thin curtains half fastened", a man "shrugged out on the sofa, undone / from his day self, / anyone"), and [Elizabeth Barrett Browning](#) ("How not to love this? Let me count the ways."). In short, here is humanity undergoing a "trial separation" from its soul.

The subsequent poems deliver a disquieting sense that we are, as one title has it, *Transient* on planet Earth. In *The Mishnah of the Moment*, the speaker suggests that seen from "the little light of history", our 'now' will be simply "a radio pulse, / a cri de couer" that some "far star may receive / a thousand years from now". *Moon, O* also directs our gaze upwards, movingly beseeching that "Chaste / goddess" to protect herself from our "cracked yearnings":

true moon, if you love us,
give us nothing. Blank us. Don't
disclose a wink of water, not a glitter-speck of ore –
nothing to raise a twinkle
in the future market's eye.

Similarly, *Smatter* warns of the perils of ignoring what we destroy in our rush to 'progress' – here, a driver "looks in the mirror", seeing only

a smattering on the windscreen, like a slash of hail
on the cusp between sharpness and slush
or the drift
of small long-legged things, the spread wings...

The visual representation of the meanings of words (here, with “drift” floating off the line) brings a little fun to the gloom, while that trick of dropping text down to the line below emphasises our own potential to ‘fall’, with big-dipper, heart-in-mouth panache. The driver here, for instance, is always

going forward

but in free fall. Travelling.

In *Developing the Negatives*, a stylistically interesting series of numbered prose stanzas, Gross consciously interrogates the appearance of writing on the page:

Imagine this: that the white space we so lovingly construct around the poem is the poem’s shadow. Not its absence, but its (no, not identical) twin.

This positive take on what lies “on the other side of light” continues in what is a typical ‘conversation’ between adjacent poems: in *A Shadow in the House*, Gross suggests that “our shadows”

are our guardians, tales of angels
as creatures of light

a deliberate diversion

so we look the other way.

The poem ends by emphasising that the ‘angel’ giving us succour throughout our frenzied journeying is “The whole / earth’s shadow”, that “folds its wings around us”. Now if Bezaliel is *God’s* shadow, this implies, perhaps, that God is *earth*... but if the collection offers a ‘message’, this probably isn’t it. Unlike *The Book of Enoch* (which explains why the Genesis flood was morally necessary), and despite, in the final poem, *Silence Like Rain*, phrases such as “rising flood”, we have not, quite, reached apocalypse. Beginning in a “Quaker meeting” (and Gross is a Quaker), it is our *silence* that is deemed morally necessary—we should, simply, stop, and listen (as do the angels in the opening poem), whereupon we might hear “silence falling on the just and unjust, / like a blessing on parched fields”. And uncannily appealing that is, too.

Review by Dawn Gorman

Dawn Gorman is poetry editor of *Caduceus*, presents West Wilts Radio’s *The Poetry Place*, is a poetry mentor and workshop leader, and works with poetry in therapeutic contexts. Her poetry publications include *This Meeting of Tracks* (Toadlily Press, 2013) and *Aloneness is a Many-Headed Bird* (Hedgehog, 2020, with Rosie Jackson), both Pushcart Prize-nominated, and *Instead Let Us Say* (Dempsey & Windle, 2019). A new pamphlet, *The Bird Room*, is due from Hedgehog in 2023.



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Sophie Flood
admin@nawe.co.uk

Information Manager: Philippa Johnston
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Publications & Editorial Manager: Lisa Koning
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