

Carol-Anne Croker & Mark Carthew - *The Boat That Rocked: Creative Writing, Higher Education and the Lure of the Seven Seas*

An excerpt based on the larger paper:

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In *The Boat that Rocked* (2009), Bill Nighy and his crew remained afloat to celebrate the joy of contemporary music by transmission through radio bandwidths available yet outside the usual parameters.

Author Bill Nighy and crew thought 'outside the square' to keep full sail ahead. Similarly, universities together with their research academics and scholars need to ensure that they are adaptable and ready to meet any unforeseen changes in the 'weather' and economic and political stormy seas as they rise.

In the 21st Century, we, crew members of the good ship Academe, need to prepare our lifeboats, train our crews and nurture our sense of adventure in readiness for the exploration of new horizons. We, (the senior, mid, early career researchers and of course the research 'deck hands'; the PhD candidates and Post Docs), need to chart new courses and reach new destinations. No longer can we chart the known disciplinary courses, we must acknowledge an imperative for inter-disciplinarity wrought by changing technologies and modes of knowledge production.

Global research connections are an increasingly important focus for all universities and governments seeking to best position themselves as providers of high quality research and partners in education and practice.

Value is now to be recognised for research proposals and projects that enhance international co-operation and collaboration between individual researchers and discipline clusters across like-minded global partners. (Govt. White Paper, 2009)

Swinburne's highly regarded writing courses, acknowledged by its recent role as part of exponential growth (Lipson, 2009) in the Open University Australia (OUA) units and courses highlights the potential for further connections and specialised courses and research. The opportunities for exploring uncharted research terrain and pedagogy within the Creative Writing discipline has never been more encouraged or supported under a [life] raft of new funding schemes and additional openings within previously limited and targeted schemes. We now have an imperative to expand our existing national and international collaborative research linkages and include areas such as children's writing and other hitherto underrepresented areas within our course offerings and in fact we would argue that an exciting opportunity exists for Swinburne and other Australian universities to establish valued

course and research cultures— and vibrant national and international linkages in this area of creative arts and writing.

Creative writing and indeed the creative arts generally are no longer positioned at the margins of the higher education system. Increasingly our practice and expertise is valued as central to the economic and cultural development of the Country for the knowledge-based economy.

The first part of this paper is looking at one very specific discipline, creative writing for children. This is currently a problematic discipline area, with the practitioner training firmly identified with the State funded TAFE sector, whilst the educational research sits within a number of disciplines in the federally funded higher education sector. This very divide is no longer workable or practical. With the 2008 -9 recommendations from the Federal Education Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard, along with the Federal Minister for Innovation, Science, Research and Industry Senator Kim Carr to bridge the false divide between the post-secondary education sectors, Swinburne as a dual sector Institution is at the very forefront of such a unification process. Swinburne has the opportunity to strengthen existing pathways for students, especially the non-traditional pathways for non VCE graduates, thus readying the University to respond instrumentally to the recommendations of the Bradley Review into Higher Education and increase enrolments of the 17-25 year old cohort of potential students by 2020.

Thus Swinburne through its higher education programs in creative writing, together with the TAFE sector programs in Professional Writing (the home of training in writing for children and young adults), together with undergraduate offerings in creative writing, media, game design and communications can lead Australia in the seamless integration between post-secondary education and the highest level of academic training, research and practice (both on campus and via flexible delivery modes via OUA).

ALL HANDS ON DECK!

Manning the lifeboats - Future directions for children's writing, creative arts practice and research.

Nuances and networks

Australian universities and other associations whose mission statements support and nurture writers, arts creators and writing courses would do well to take a long hard look at the structure and pro-active model of the National Association for Writers in Education (NAWE) in the UK —and the positive outcomes of integrating academic endeavour with action research and active practitioner writing / literature and education linkages.

The National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE) is the one organization supporting the development of creative writing of all genres and in all educational and community settings throughout the UK.

(NAWE, 2005, cited July 9th 2009)

Writing and literature based professional associations such as the Australian association of AAWP , ASAL / ASA / SCBWI / FAW / CBCA, etc etc would seem to have similar base philosophies and mandates for the promotion of authors, creators and appreciation of literature— yet for all intensive purposes they act as disparate group diminishing their role as advocates for positive change in the process. The recent public debate on parallel importation has highlighted the importance of strong, unified advocacy to provide a conduit for authorial voice and the Australian society of authors has certainly been visible presence in the debate. However who in the general public knows what the acronyms ASAL, FAW, SCBWI, AAWP, SLAV, ALEA stand for? Let alone CHASS & AHH or ASSA.

We would argue that if these and the myriad of other representative groups wish to truly expand the opportunities for their cohort of members, then a strong, coordinated presence is certainly required with an increased public profile and appreciation of their role; especially when the cultural bias in our 'land down under' is seemingly well and truly aligned with sport—as opposed to the creative arts.

Universities along with associated writing and education courses have an important role in assisting increased understandings of value of the arts. Universities and researchers have access to funding regimes only dreamed of my smaller associations and also have kudos and the privileged position of intellectual standing and status when it comes to advocacy and input into government decision making and funding processes.

The struggling position of the smaller associations is evidenced by the peak body for children's literature in Australia the CBCA (Children's Book council of Australia) having to cancel it biennial conference due to lack of a financial viability. CBCA National President Marg Kirkland's pathos filled public statement re: this showpiece on the national calendar, demands attention from arts funding and government bodies who purport to support the arts:

'It is with the deepest regret that we announce that the CBCA conference in 2010 will no longer be held. Following advice re the current economic climate, we are taking action now to avoid the risk of a great financial burden to the CBCA.'

(Kirkland, cited from the CBCA, 2009).

If ever an argument existed for re-evaluating the structure and the role of the Australia Council in supporting such institutions and funding in the arts, now is the time. It begs the obvious question. Would such a situation occur in the UK in 2009?

Luckily, momentum appears to be gathering for combined voices and strategy. Melbourne's recent designation as a UNESCO City of Literature - Melbourne / Edinburgh - * in combination with the establishment the Centre for the Book under the directorship of Chrissy Sinclair at the Victorian State Library is a positive sign of movement in the right direction. The formation of the Australian Children's Literature Alliance with well known children's literature advocate Bronwen Bennett at the chair and a committee with a reasonably broad representation of people from industry and practice is another sign of the desire for a more coordinated approach:

The Australian Children's Literature Alliance (ACLA) will focus on creating a national children's laureate and a website to profile writing for young people. The ACLA board has been formed, drawing on representatives from publishers, booksellers, creators and major national children's literature organizations.

(Australia Council for the Arts, 2009)

The Children's Laurette, modelled on the UK model of poet and children's author Michael Rosen, is an exciting step in raising the public profile of and importance of children's literature and indeed literature in general. Appreciation of adult literature is logically a step that evolves from early exposure and appreciation of language and literature and as Ms Bennett has said:

...the laureate would be the public face of the children's and young adult book industry, and act as its advocate on relevant issues. The idea is based on the successful Children's Laureate program run in Britain for the past 10 years, which was the brainchild of poet Ted Hughes and children's writer Michael Morpurgo. Britain appointed its first Laureate in 1999, the children's book illustrator Quentin Blake, whose work appears in many Roald Dahl books. The US launched a similar program, the Ambassador for Young People's Literature, last year.

(Bennett, cited in The Australian, 2009)

Such a move is strategically designed to increase public awareness of literature and the value to our creative and literary culture of book creators. In January 2008 the USA [Library of Congress](#) inaugurated its [National Ambassador for Young People's Literature](#) scheme and appointed high profile children author [Jon Scieszka](#) as ambassador.

Paradigms and Prizes

While the initiatives outlined above are timely and exciting, the opportunity also exists for universities to participate in and contribute proactively to global research connections and ground level active practitioner research.

The Bradley Report (2008) firmly recommends and highlights the importance of these types of initiatives and international linkages. Last year's Creative Arts PhD Roundtables in Sydney & Melbourne (ALTC, 2008) and recent initiatives via ACUADS, CHASS etc et al all point to a need for universities and their respective staff to actively involve themselves in the exciting opportunities to affirm the alignment between research and practice in the arts.

The role of children's writing in creative writing courses is ALSO one of significant interest to a growing body of active practitioners in the genre —aspiring, emerging and experienced.

In a not related issue ALCA Chair, Bronwen Bennett has commented that:

There's a perception in the broader community that children's literature, for authors, is an apprenticeship for writing 'real books' and it's not always given the credence it

deserves," she said. Australia has a rich tradition in producing the very best children's writing, from literary greats such as Colin Thiele and Patricia Wrightson through to the irreverent humour of Andy Griffiths. And if we don't have reading children, we won't have reading adults.

(Bennett, 2009)

With an increasing number of aspiring children's writers subscribing to industry based magazines such as *Pass It On*, *Buzz Words* and *The Reading Stack* and joining organizations such as the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI), children's writing would seem to be an increasingly important genre for the writing community. However in a topic for future quantitative research, the genre of children's and young adult writing would seem appear underrepresented in the streams of academic writing conferences, journals and in the course structures that also have a strange delineation or 'thin blue line' of between Professional Writing and Editing and Creative Writing. It would appear however that some universities are responding to this need and The University of Southern Queensland, with award winning author Gary Crew recently appointed as Associate Professor in Creative writing, is certainly one university actively striving to broaden its course writing genre focus.

Anecdotal evidence from my own experience as a tutor at Swinburne University indicates that a significant number of Swinburne Masters students show a demonstrable interest in children's and young adult writing; and that's also reflected by the growing linkages to the genre in the major writing festivals and metropolitan & regional writing centres around the country.

In noting the award of the City of Literature Jason Steger (2008) reporting for *The Age* newspaper, reported the then Arts Minister Lynne Kosky as saying that:

The decision was confirmation of the value of a lot of people who have been working in the literature industry - writers and publishers and those who support writing and publishing. "It gives confirmation to them not only about the work they've done but the quality and also the importance of their work to our city and why they are a critical component of it. Also what it (the decision) does is celebrate literature as an important art form, and through the centre we will continue to grow that interest and art form."

(Kosky cited in Steger: *The Age*, 2008)

Steven Carroll, the winner of last year's Miles Franklin Literary Award, also said it confirmed that Melbourne as the cultural centre of Australia.

Melbourne has over the last century inspired some of the greatest works of Australian literature. There is just something about the place - just think books by the likes of Hal Porter, George Johnston, Miles Franklin and Helen Garner.

(Carroll, cited in Steger 2008)

This is also backed up by the UNESCO recognition that Melbourne is home to a third of all Australian writers and to Australia's publishing sector. (2008) What is missing in the conversation is that Melbourne is also home to some of the world's most notable children's writers & illustrators—not the least being world renowned author illustrators Graeme Base, Shaun Tan & Leigh Hobbs, Ann Spudvilas, Ann James and last year's International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award winning author Sonya Hartnett, to name just a few. Sonya Hartnett's winning of this award acknowledges Australia's standing to the field.

168 candidates from more than 60 countries worldwide have been nominated for the 2010 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award. More than 100 expert organizations from all over the world have nominated candidates for the 2010 Award. Among the nominees are contemporary authors, illustrators, oral storytellers and promoters of reading. The Award is given in memory of Astrid Lindgren, in recognition of outstanding life-time achievements in the fields of children's and young adult literature.

(IBBY, 2010)

Some fundamental questions arise.

Why is there such a struggle to have children's literature included in so many areas of our cultural and academic fabric?

Is there a 'blocking' hierarchy of writing, subjugating children's writers?

Why is this productive area so seemingly underrepresented in the anthologies of Australian literature?

In Melbourne's home town 'big ticket awards', The Vic Premier's Literary Awards, there is no 'real' children's section, yet arguably Victoria has the largest percentage of children's writers in Australia living in our state.

In 2009 prizes will be awarded in the following categories:

[The Vance Palmer Prize for Fiction](#)

[The Nettie Palmer Prize for Non-fiction](#)

[The Prize for Young Adult Fiction](#)

[The Prize for an Unpublished Manuscript by an Emerging Victorian Writer](#)

[The CJ Dennis Prize for Poetry](#)

[The Louis Esson Prize for Drama](#)

[The Alfred Deakin Prize for an Essay Advancing Public Debate](#)

[The John Curtin Prize for Journalism](#)

[The Prize for Best Music Theatre Script](#)

[The Grollo Ruzzene Foundation Prize for Writing about Italians in Australia](#)

[The Prize for Science Writing](#)

(State Library of Victoria, 2009 <http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/programs/literary/pla/>)

Even the young adult category guidelines above exclude picture book or primary age writers, citing that, 'This prize is offered for a published work of fiction or collection of short stories written for a readership between the ages of 13 and 18.' (SLV, 2009) All other sections are specifically designed for adult genres.

Fortunately there are many other awards available for writers that encompass a broad range of genres. On the positive side of ledger, it is heartening to see awards such as the Queensland Premiers Literary Awards, Speech Pathology Australia Book of the Year Awards, Environment Award for Children's Literature and various state wide children's choice wards such as KOALA, YABBA and Aurealis Awards et al providing extra opportunities across genres.

It is also heartening to see the emergence of growing connections between art, design, writing and other disciplines evidenced by the upcoming Art.Media.Design. Writing Intersections Conference to be held at Swinburne (2009); acknowledging the interwoven synthesises in practice and practice led research and the links to the impatience of art and design as vital linkages within creative arts and writing genres.

In this context, it is worthwhile noting that:

While the quality of writing and subsequent enlightenment communicated to others is the litmus test which writers are ultimately judged by, a failure to embrace the potential of reaching an audience with an appetite for and learning styles enhanced via visual imagery would seem counterproductive.

(Carthew, 2009)

Future harbours?

We suggest that this is the for any future roundtables discerning direction in the arts – that research, practice and public recognition all synthesize to provide opportunities for writers and those interested in all literature genres and related linkages.

The University of Queensland's mantra for its Doctor of Creative Arts provides a wonderful framework for such endeavors and also provides a link between academic research, practice-led research and professional practice:

The Doctor of Creative Arts is a research higher degree designed for professionals such as academics, writers, producers or art directors with existing industry experience, who wish to further their critical and theoretically-informed research capacity.

(USC, 2009)

Opportunities exist for linkages across disciplines especially with education, early childhood, language development, ESL, linguistics, anthropology, socio-linguistics, musicology, music therapy, speech therapy, library courses etc. While pragmatic, it also strengthens ways of attracting funding and positioning projects for demonstrable benefit & community based outcomes.

Certainly the natural linkages between children's writing and language development / conceptual frameworks et al. are enormous. The various NAWA Writers in Schools

Research Projects (2009) are indicative of the many opportunities for cross discipline research and linkages with active practitioner methodology.

An interesting dilemma, as the role of the students and researchers need to be grounded in practice by definition yet, students are seeking to gain insight into practice, and certainly anecdotally specific 'training'. I would argue that the long term sustainability of a higher degree creative writing course in an increasingly competitive environment – is to offer both insights into real life writing practice by strengthening linkages with industry & networks, expertise of staff in relations to genre based units and also increase pathways for researchers and research to practice their own practise led craft and share their expertise with others in international environments as well as at home.

Melbourne's newly crowned and privileged status as a UNESCO City of Literature provides a unique opportunity for exposure of all genres in literature to make inroads into our cultural psyche and funding structures. It also provides an exciting platform from which to develop greater cohesion between the arts and education sectors and further recognition of Australia's capacity for producing quality children's literature. The move to establish ongoing roundtable discussions on ways of integrating research with active practice in the higher education sector, will hopefully provide impedance to enhanced funding arrangements and generate greater understanding across the broader community and higher education sector of the value of the children's genre within the creative arts.

Setting sail on the seven seas?

The question arises, is Swinburne to 'set sail' off towards these new horizons or is the University to remain anchored to the out-dated thinking of previous Governments despite the paradigm shift that have taken place within the University regulatory authorities, the research funding agencies and within the global higher education discourse?

By examining the 2009 Swinburne media releases and documents, it is notable that amongst the STEM sector contributions to knowledge, the University does market (advertise) its creative arts practitioners as some public faces of the University.

In the second issue of the Swinburne magazine distributed quarterly with the Australian's Higher Education Supplement one of the chosen profile pieces was on award-winning children's author Graeme Base, a Swinburne alumnus. In the article the writer of the piece links Graeme's success to his education opportunities in the practice of writing.

"...But there is a correlation between Base's celebrity as the world's leading creator of picture story books [sic] and his steadfast participation in the whole publishing process, a trait that had its origins at Swinburne in the late seventies..."

Base himself is then quoted:

'Against the recommendation of his high school art teacher, who campaigned for his enrolment at the University of Melbourne's fine arts degree. Base insisted he "was more practical and project driven", opting instead for graphic design at what was then Swinburne College of Technology.'

“(Swinburne Magazine June 2008, Issue)

This articulation between what is the TAFE sector's strength, that of practical project driven practitioner-training, is precisely the pedagogy that ensures the relevance and popularity of the creative writing programs within Swinburne's Higher Education Faculty some thirty years on.

Since 2003 practice-led (or practice-based) higher degrees in the creative arts have become common within the tertiary education sector. Graduates from these programs are now winning awards and global recognition for their arts practice.

One brief glance at Swinburne's own June 2009 wiki entry online lists its famous alumni:

- Gillian Armstrong: film director
- Graeme Base: children's author
- Mark Bolton: AFL player with Essendon Football Club
- Kathy Bowlen: ABC radio and television journalist and presenter
- Alisa Camplin: Olympian and aerial skier
- Domenic Carosa: CEO Destra Corporation
- Ray Crooke: artist
- Mark Korda: Founder KordaMentha
- Michael Leunig: cartoonist
- Richard Lowenstein: film director
- Sidney Nolan: artist
- John Raciti: Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts
- Steve Stubbings: cricketer with English County Club, Derbyshire
- Philomena Tan: author
- Sarah Watt: film director and writer.

Some 66% of the people listed are drawn from the Creative Industries Faculties from Swinburne. This list could be updated by adding current students of Swinburne. For example in the PhD (Writing) program James Phelan has published five books for Random House, Australia with his most recent, *Liquid Gold*, then fourth in his Lachlan Fox blockbuster series released August 2009. James is working on his fifth Lachlan Fox novel and a non-fiction book for his PhD.

Lecturer and PhD graduate, Carolyn Beasley has had her first novel, the *Memory of Marble*, published by Rock Bank Press and her PhD novel, *The Finger Print Thief*, is under

consideration by a major Australian publisher. Laurent Boulanger has had his first novel, *The Girl From France*, published by Rock View Press and has completed his second novel for his PhD.

PhD candidate Glenice Whitting's first novel, *From Pickle to Pie* was published by Illura Press and launched at the Emerging Writer's strand at the Melbourne Writer's Festival in 2008. Glenice is working on her second novel for her PhD.

In the area of children's writing, PhD candidate Mark Carthew has edited/written and collated over sixty picture story books for most major publishing houses. Since enrolling in his PhD, Mark has released two picture-story books (*Five Little Owls*, *The Gobbling Tree*) and one book of rhyme (*Wicked Wizards and Leaping Lizards*). *Five Little Owls* and *Wicked Wizards & Leaping Lizards* were both shortlisted for the 2008 Speech Pathology Australia Book of the Year awards and *Five Little Owls* is (currently) released in Australia, South Africa, New Zealand and Korea; *The Gobbling Tree* shortlisted for the 2009 Speech Pathology Australia Book Awards (Lower Primary).

Mark's PhD artefact is the anthology of children's poetry and rhymes, *Can You Keep A Secret*, released by Random House in 2009. Mark has recorded an accompanying CD and this book has been awarded a Children's Book Council of Australia Notable Book for 2009. Before Christmas Mark has two books being re-released: *Newt, Lutes & Bandicoots*, and *Witches in Britches: Itches and Twitches* both with UK illustrator Mike Spoor. In October 2009, Mark's newest collaboration (**Machino Supremo!** Poems about Machines) with Janeen Brian and illustrated by John **Veeken** is to be released by Celapene Press. This is an anthology of original poetry for children.

There can be no stronger argument for the intersection between the academy, writing practice and the broader Creative Industries than the Swinburne creative writing alumni. These writers are forging national reputations, establishing global linkages as well as delivering research opportunities to Swinburne which demonstrates the relevance of arts practice in the Australian economy.

And with Melbourne a UNESCO centre for literature, Swinburne being a founding University member of the City of Melbourne "Office of Knowledge Capital", together with the proximity of the opening of the Centre for Books and Ideas at the State Library of Victoria. To ignore the importance of the literary creative industries to Victoria and indeed Australia's economic future is short-sighted and out of touch with global trends. Swinburne must brand itself, alongside the City of Melbourne as a leader in Creative City/ Creative Industries research and development.

"Courting divergent ideas and inputs isn't about political correctness: it's an economic growth imperative."

(Florida, 2007:p.39)

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