

RMIT University, Macquarie University and CQUniversity, Australia

Catherine Cole, Marcelle Freiman and Donna Lee Brien

The Strange Bedfellows or Perfect Partners Papers: the refereed proceedings of the 15th conference of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs, 2010

Editorial introduction

Since 1996, the Australasian Association of Writing Programs has held an annual conference at university campuses in cities and regional centres in Australia and New Zealand. Alongside this conference, the biannual publications of *TEXT* refereed journal each April and October (established in 1997) and, most recently, these collections of refereed conference papers (published since 2007) have created a space for teachers, researchers and advanced students of writing to articulate, disseminate and receive feedback on their current research in a supportive and productive environment. As such, the annual AAWP conference and its publication outcomes have become the most important forum in Australasia for the discussion of all aspects of teaching and researching creative and professional writing and for debating current theories on creativity, writing, pedagogy and other relevant matters.

Each year one university in the AAWP network hosts the annual conference and organises the papers in both the refereed and general streams. All abstracts are refereed before presentation, and then a number of papers (developed from the version presented at each conference) are submitted to a double blind referee publication process (that is, where neither referee or author know, or learn, of each others' identities), and subsequently edited, formatted and published in an open access electronic format on the AAWP website in the same year as the conference. The papers thus published form an important resource of the most up-to-date research in writing being undertaken in Australasia, as well as an indication of the main themes of each conference. These, as all past years' refereed proceedings, are freely available on the AAWP website to all readers with access to the Internet.

In 2010, RMIT University, Melbourne, hosted the annual conference, which was titled, *Strange Bedfellows or Perfect Partners: The Role of Literary Studies in Creative Writing programs*. The School of Media and Communication which organised the conference is home to tertiary sector programs in writing, book publishing and editing, music industry, photography, design, Asian studies, philosophy, PR and advertising, games and interactive media, and communication studies among other disciplines. This means that students and staff have numerous opportunities to work together on projects encompassing a range of creative approaches. There is often a natural tension generated between these areas during the creative conversation. Some of these involve incorporating new ways in which to locate the written word and writing studies in this multidisciplinary environment. With new developments in technology in relation to book publishing, and greater

engagements with narratives beyond the printed page, creative writing students and staff have, for instance, been exploring what it means to be a writer in a multi-disciplinary digital, globalised world.

In common with many universities which also teach and research literature and literary studies alongside creative and professional writing, questions arise in this environment about the place of more traditionally based subjects within, or relation to, cross-disciplinary, practice-based programs. The 2010 conference themes grew from thinking about the role of writing and literature in the contemporary, practice and industry-focused academy. Literary studies have long been a source of study and inspiration for writers and from this relationship has come the notion that writers need to be widely read and exposed to a wide range of ‘canonical’ texts—especially fledgling writers who have not been exposed to the world’s literature. Should our students, for instance, study literature in the traditional ways, the great classics of 19th century Britain and Europe, or should they, instead, study Australia’s diverse post-colonial and indigenous narratives? Or, should they be exposed to wider notions of reading which draw on many other narratives including those of games, music and popular culture? And, perhaps most importantly, how might we manage a balance of all these approaches?

The conference papers included in these proceedings reveal the wide scope of responses to our call for papers. There is a wealth of material on the teaching of creative writing and the student-teacher relationship, including the stimulating, and at times demanding, postgraduate-supervisor relationship. There are papers that reinterpret notions of writing, as well as those which examine specific aspects of writing, such as place and character, and specialised points of focus including travel and food writing. The current interest in teaching, learning, researching and writing poetry, creative nonfiction essays and memoir is well represented in these papers. Other papers explore writing as community, and make thoughtful and thought-provoking excursions into reinterpreting myths and stories and their role in the contemporary academy. There are also significant dialogues around reading, teaching and creativity; about identity, memory and voice; and dealing with ethics, professionalism and the publishing market.

These diverse and thought-provoking papers were contextualised within the addresses presented by the conference’s keynote speakers. Brenda Walker from the University of Western Australia explored the intense and deeply personal relationships between readers and books. Andrew Cowan from the University of East Anglia provocatively questioned the roles of reading and writing in the creative writing workshop. The Australian Learning and Teaching Council’s Jonathan Holmes offered further insights into the interconnections between teaching, learning and creative practice. The crime writer, Shane Maloney, located Melbourne as the hub of a rich and highly amusing criminal literary culture. Chris Gribble, visiting from the Norwich City of Literature bid, drew links between the vital literary and cultural relationships that the UNESCO Cities of Literature share.

Ironically perhaps, despite the explicit call for papers addressing the issue, literary studies academics (who sometimes complain that creative writing has usurped the place of literary studies in the academy) are less well represented than the convenors expected. We would have welcomed more papers from these scholars on the pedagogical relationship between literary studies and creative practice, and indeed hoped for a significant group of papers addressing the relationship between practice and critical studies, and the ways in which both areas enrich and support one another. Instead, it was largely creative and professional writing researchers and practitioners who responded to the call for papers by, for example, framing creative practice in relation to other academic disciplines, including literary studies, and in their engagements with such approaches as literary theory, feminism, queer theory and psychology. A number of papers shone new light on canonical texts from a range of different fields, including English and other literatures, philosophy, the classics and psychology. These contributions offered new insights into ‘old’ texts and new approaches to a broad range of disciplines framed within humanities and social sciences.

This is not surprising. The fifteen AAWP conferences and decade and a half of publications in *TEXT* reveal the extent of the range of university-based interdisciplinary approaches mobilised by writing teachers, creative practitioners and researchers. The proceedings of this 2010 conference show, moreover, not only a continued vigor in such interdisciplinary investigation, but also a new confidence of approach. In considering the issue of whether writing and literary studies are ‘perfect partners’ or ‘strange bedfellows’, the diverse, interesting and creative papers in this collection move outwards from this proposition to embrace, and work from, the tension generated by all kinds of intellectual, professional and even personal questions. All these questions, and the answers presented herein, are pertinent to academics in today’s writing programs and to many others both in, and outside, the academy. And so, just as the responses of these writers reflect their passion for words and delight in sharing these with their readers, we are delighted to share this collection with you.

Professor Catherine Cole, Convenor of the 2010 AAWP Annual conference on behalf of RMIT University, is Professor of Creative Writing, and Discipline Head of Writing and Communication at RMIT University.

Dr Marcelle Freiman is the current Chair (President) of the AAWP and a Senior Lecturer in English at Macquarie University where she teaches creative writing, post-colonial and diaspora literatures, and poetry.

Associate Professor Donna Lee Brien is the Immediate Past President (Chair) of the AAWP, Acting Dean of the School of Creative and Performing Arts, and Associate Professor of Creative Industries at CQUniversity, Australia.