

**Griffith University and Central Queensland University, Australia**

**Nigel Krauth and Donna Lee Brien**

**Creative writing under the ERA: writing under duress, but relatively happy**

Abstract:

The Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) research evaluation process includes creative work, including creative writing. This article discusses the effect that writing under the ERA is having on academics in creative writing, including probing the attitudes to ERA that creative writing academics hold. It presents the results of a survey run with writing academics who contributed to an ERA-inspired special issue of *TEXT* journal, which included questions about writing, and reviewing, creative work under ERA guidelines.

Biographical notes:

Associate Professor Nigel Krauth is head of the writing program at Griffith University, Gold Coast, Australia. He has published four novels (two of them national award winners) and three teenage novels, along with stories, essays, articles and reviews. His research investigates creative writing processes and the teaching of creative writing. He is the co-founding editor of *TEXT: Journal of writing and writing courses*, which is currently in its sixteenth year of publication.

Professor Donna Lee Brien is Professor of Creative Industries and Associate Dean, Research & Postgraduate, in the School of Creative and Performing Arts at CQUniversity, Australia, where she also chairs the Creative and Performing Arts Special Interest Research Group for the Learning and Teaching Education Research Centre. Widely published on Australian food writers and their influence, Donna is a Past President of the national peak body, the Australasian Association of Writing Programs, and current Commissioning Editor, Special Issues, for *TEXT* journal.

Keywords:

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## Introduction

Two years ago, in the introduction to the first *TEXT* special issue devoted entirely to creative writing by academics in Australia, we wrote that:

particular mention must be made of David Brooks' bracing statement regarding his poem's innovative and groundbreaking significance: "As to research, *poetry is always its own research*" (Krauth, Webb & Brien 2010).

Brooks voiced a feeling which provided a strong sub-plot to the narrative of creative writing in universities then being articulated under the aegis of the Australian Research Council's (ARC) requirements for creative work to be recognised as an academic output in Australia. Succinctly, Brooks pointed to arguments about the role of the creative arts in culture and society, the importance of the freedom of creative writers to express themselves, and the significance of creative writing as a domain of investigation in its own right, rather than one fettered by ideological or institutional interference. In this resistance, it is clear that the university system, by placing performance controls on creative writing, could be seen as dictating terms to a domain which had progressed for centuries by resisting ideological and other strictures.

Published at the same time as Brooks' statement, in the regular issue of *TEXT*, Philip Neilsen lampooned the then current requirements of the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) evaluation in his poem 'The Poem as Research' (Neilsen 2010). Here Neilsen mocks and enacts the problem of the ERA intervention into creative writing processes. For example, the first two stanzas, before the 'actual' poem gets underway state:

*Problem:* to examine contradictory cultural formations around the jacaranda (*Bignoniaceae*).

*Case study:* its association with seasonal anxiety & libido in Brisbane university students of the 1960s.

*Methodology:* the flowering plant extended metaphor of the poem draws on rite of passage models, eco-critical & poststructuralist allusions and tropes, self-parodying, nostalgic, or uplifting (Neilsen 2010).

In this, Neilsen warns about the kind of poetry that might emerge under ERA – a self-consciously referenced, un-spontaneous, servile product of a demanding system.

At that time, both Brooks and Neilsen were suggesting that the ARC's requirements could be understood as an unwelcome manipulation, and lead to the situation where writers in universities end up producing a different kind of creative writing to those placed outside academia. The pressures on writers outside the university are both cultural and financial – writers who are not academics seek to combine what they need to say with how they can both say it and feed themselves at the same time. Some academic creative writers, those on the payroll of our universities, Brooks and Neilsen remind us, pay the price for having a good income by writing what (or how) they don't really want to.

The situation may be even more serious than this. Brooks and Neilsen also both suggest that the ERA requirements are a kind of censorship. From 2009 on, a creative writer in a university must, in order to have his or her creative work recognised as research, write according to the ERA formula (i.e. the work must involve ‘innovation and new knowledge ... [and] excellence’ (ARC 2010: 41), or risk non-recognition in the academic workplace. This in itself is serious, as poor research performance may lead to lack of promotion, increased teaching workloads and even dismissal. Having been appointed (as has often been the case) to a university largely in recognition of an unfettered emerging or established creative career as a writer, this employee’s writing will now be assessed according to a formula rubber-stamped by the ARC. It is as if the ARC, and the government standing behind it, have taken a ‘State Art’ stance on the kind of creative writing by academics that they will recognise (and reward), that is, *writers will produce the kind of writing that the State (ARC) wants*.

Creative writing, the universities that employ creative writers, the Australian Research Council, and publishers are definitely not on the same page in this situation:

- creative writing wants, as ever, to go its own way as an independent observer and a critic of human enterprise, seeking to be a powerful voice in social and moral debate;
- universities want performance indicators in order to distribute research funds within institutions;
- the ARC and the Government want a means by which research in creative writing can be equated with research in the earth sciences, medicine, sociology and other disciplines, so that taxpayer moneys can be distributed according to a set funding formula; and,
- publishers are fixated on their bottom lines, wanting writing that will sell, or otherwise attract readers (as, for instance, to online sites).

This means that if an academic chooses now to produce a research-rich, radically-structured, experimental piece which shunts the literary boundaries and, therefore, does not get published by a mainstream publisher, that academic has to explain to the university why the work was published in a dark corner of the literary world by an unknown publisher who had no funds for publicity, marketing and distribution, and why no-one has heard about it. It also means that if an academic chooses to slip significantly innovative material into a readily-publishable but well-worn genre formula, that academic not only has to explain to the university how the work could be a blockbuster and also research (when the genre is not known for being groundbreaking/innovative), but also why the research community should not (in this case) ignore an output published by a self-avowedly mainstream, popular and populist publisher such as Harlequin, CowBoy or Erotica Inc.

Yet these are the various and often contradictory demands that creative writers in academia are often juggling today. These are the demands being made by what we could call ‘their art’, the ARC/ERA, their universities and the publishers with whom they are trying to get published. We recognise that this is sometimes a difficult mix

and, into this maelstrom, we insert the current collection: the second *TEXT Special Issue* devoted to creative writing by academics in Australian universities.

### **Creative writing as research: update since the last *TEXT* collection**

After *Special Issue Number 7*, which received a great deal of positive comment from both readers and the contributors to this issue, and was reportedly used by some universities as a model for producing creative-work-plus-research-statements for the ERA, *TEXT* trialled the idea that creative works submitted to the regular journal issues should be accompanied by a research statement as per the ARC/ERA requirements, thus making these creative works immediately externally recognisable as research. Prior to this, *TEXT* had published a wide variety of creative pieces by both academic and freelance writers, and the *TEXT* creative pages were seen as a significant publishing outlet. Following the announcement, creative contributions dried up. The April 2010 issue contained no creative pieces because no author complied with the request to add a research statement. Writers were not attracted to the idea that publication in what they perceived as a ‘normal’ publishing environment should include the provision of such an exegetical analysis. *TEXT* subsequently reversed its requirements, and creative contributions continued to flow in as before.

In the same period, the ERA dropped its journal-ranking categories (whereby journals were ranked from A\* to C and an ‘unranked’ category), but many universities have continued to employ the old rankings in a variety of situations. This means that an article or creative work published in *TEXT*, previously an A-ranked journal, in many cases still has an ‘A-ranked’ kudos attached. Many have attested to how discussion about ERA in many university committees continues to refer to these rankings, and that, thus, this notion of hierarchy persists in the evaluation of creative output. Unfortunately, creative writing as art does not fit well in this schema. The most influential movements in the arts – and the most avant-garde creative research – have often been initiated in the least likely and non-mainstream publications.

Different universities also continue to articulate differing interpretations of the significance of creative work in the ERA process. Some of these universities send submissions forward to the ARC emphasising their creative output; others are more reticent, privileging refereed articles in previously highly ranked journals. Even before creative outputs are reviewed by the external ARC-appointed ERA referees, these creative works are processed at numerous levels. The creative academic has a say in what they submit as a research output and how they frame their creative work in the research statement. This submission is then processed (and sometimes critiqued and/or edited) by a variety of others that may include the discipline/School’s ERA representative, the Head of School, the Dean, the Research Office, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research). By the time a piece of creative writing as research reaches those ERA reviewers it may have been pushed and pulled to an extent rarely experienced in the real world mêlée of publishers and media critics.

Also contentious is the issue of ‘portfolioing’ – a portfolio being defined by the ARC in the *ERA Submission Guidelines* as a group of minor works presented as ‘a cohesive/thematic collection of the work of a single creator’ and being ‘equal to one

research output' (ARC 2011: 46). The problem with the definition is that it doesn't specify the number or the substance of the items included in a portfolio, nor is it clear whether (and how) the portfolio might be argued to equal an article or a book. Some universities are, indeed, for instance, now stating that a specific number of poems are 'equivalent' to one refereed article and any poem will only gain a point as part of a portfolio of this number of pieces, with no consideration of the content or how long the individual poems are, or whether there is any research relationship between any of the works. Although we understand the thinking behind the idea of the portfolio, some creative writers will no doubt perceive this 'bundling' of work as a dilution of the value of their writing. The investigation in a single poem, for instance, may take a significant level of research engagement and a correspondingly substantial amount of time to conduct, finalise and then 'write up' (an engagement and result which the writer may feel is equivalent to that of an academic article). When the research findings are condensed down in the way that poetry must be condensed, however, demands for portfolioing reject the possibility that such a creative work could ever be 'worth' the same as an academic article in terms of research endeavour.

The peer review element is another contentious part of the ERA process. Peer reviewing, as applied to any academic paper/work/discipline, is much more controversial than many academics would think, with many elements currently not functioning well or completely dysfunctional (see, for example, Johnston & Krauth 2008; Brien, Burr & Webb 2010). Academic peer review was introduced into the sciences to ensure quality control and to protect authorship, but while writers, as workers in the creative writing industry, have always been subject to review in the form of publishers' readings, editors' revisions, critics' analyses and public/readers' opinion, they have not experienced the kind of reviewing that has been now instituted by the ERA. They are, some feel, writing for one industry, but being assessed by another.

The ARC Excellence Research Branch describes the ERA review process for creative writing in the following way:

Peer review in ERA is a holistic evaluation of a sample of the outputs which have been nominated by institutions for peer review. It is not an evaluation of individual researchers or of individual outputs and it is not a blind process. The name of the author of the creative work is provided to ERA reviewers along with other metadata associated with the work. Peer review for each unit of evaluation is undertaken by multiple members of the relevant Research Evaluation Committee, and by peer reviewers external to, and advising the Research Evaluation Committee (Excellence Research Branch 2012).

This makes it clear that this process is not double blind as is recognised best practice in academic peer reviewing. Nor does it provide, however, the individual feedback to the author that is usual in the publishing industry and critical review processes. In the ERA, the creative writer's work undergoes a conveyor-belt style evaluation where it is sorted, picked over and appraised according to veiled academic criteria about global standards. The nearest similar experience for a professional creative writer might be sending work to a literary competition where the judges are only vaguely known and

the outcomes explained in summative and minimal terms. So, in that sense, although somewhat ironically, the ERA review process is not completely unfamiliar to creative writers.

### **This collection: *Creative writing as research II***

As editors of *TEXT*, our thinking on this matter is that the ERA is in place and it is, therefore, important to investigate both how creative writers can most profitably work within its structures and the role *TEXT* can play in facilitating and, perhaps, even refining and improving, this process. Academic writers are, after all, a set of privileged creative artists embraced at the bosom of academia and, at very least, the ERA exercise is attempting an assessment of our work in research terms. This is the motivation for the fifteenth Special Issue of *TEXT*, *Creative Writing as Research II*, which collects and presents creative contributions made by an invited group of academics across Australia in 2012. This collection includes works of poetry, short prose including short stories, creative nonfiction and food writing, and a theatre script, each accompanied by a research statement written and presented to ERA requirements. The 19 writers who responded were all refereed by the pool of respondents itself under a double-blind system, each writer receiving at least two peer reviews. In this process, each contribution was peer reviewed by at least two other academic creative writers. The input of a small number of other expert reviewers was also sought when necessary, and especially when contradictory reports were received.

As a further component of this process, input was sought from the contributors, seeking commentary on writing creatively under the ERA. A survey was presented to contributors as a multiple-choice questionnaire with options for further comments.<sup>1</sup> It comprised 10 questions about the experience of contributing to the *TEXT Special Issue* collection. It focused on the experience of (i) being refereed as a creative writer under ERA, ii) writing in the academic context under ERA, and iii) peer-reviewing the work of creative colleagues. 12 of our participants responded. Although this is a small sample, it does provide a snapshot of how a number of creative writing academics who had both participated in various aspects of the ERA exercise and were then currently engaged in writing, editing and refereeing work for *TEXT* under the ERA-defined processes, were thinking about the issues raised by the ERA evaluation. We deal with the questions and the responses to them, one by one, below.

#### **1. How did you like having your creative work refereed for this *TEXT* special issue?**

62.5% replied they were ‘okay’ with having their creative work refereed and 37.5% said they ‘liked’ it. That is, 100% were positive or generally happy about being refereed for this collection. Responses included:

The comments were very helpful and I was referred to some excellent texts and so I very much appreciated the process!

All creative work submitted anywhere is subject to some form of ‘refereeing’ by editors etc and so I think in that context its useful. In addition of course here the

research statement is also being assessed. I think this is the challenge, to be able to articulate the creative work in academic terms – I found the feedback useful in relation to both aspects.

I like having my work refereed in principle but it does depend on the quality of the comments how much I enjoy it and whether I feel the referee fully understands what I am trying to do. Also it is sometimes difficult to follow advice about creative work because it has many non-rational components and to some extent you have to follow your own instincts. I also don't like to revise a piece several months after I have finished it because by that time I am in a different space creatively. Whereas I can easily return to an article after it has been refereed, it is much harder for me to return to creative work after a gap.

While I appreciated very much the opportunity to have my work read and commented upon, I felt that my creative work was not engaged with nearly as much as the exegesis. It seemed that the readers were more comfortable talking about the prosaic/academic portion of the piece rather than the creative portion, which suggests that there aren't very clear guidelines/practices for how we, as academics & writers, should interact critically with submissions composed of creative & critical components. Looking at my readers' reports, it seems that the attraction towards the academic/exegetical component is much stronger than towards the creative component.

... it was hilarious to see how different the two responses were.

*Summary:* Responses to the opening question of the survey set the tone for what followed. Academics cautiously welcomed the idea that their work should be refereed, but questioned the process in relation to both what they perceived as disengaged readings of their creative work and the concept of the creative work being read in conjunction with an exegetical statement. We believe that the academics inclined towards refereeing the academic component more thoroughly because they are familiar with the process of academic refereeing in that context. There may also have been some feeling that creative work stood somewhat outside this refereeing context. The final comment above reminds us of how differences in opinion and personal taste will always affect refereeing processes, just as they do other areas of publishing and criticism.

## ***2. Is having your creative work refereed similar to being edited by a publisher/editor?***

In response to this question, 67% said it was 'somewhat like', and 33% said it was 'quite unlike'. That is, 100% were in agreement in being convinced the process was not very much like the normal publication editing process. Comments here included:

An author establishes a relationship between equals with his/her commercial editor. There is a dialogue and consultation regarding what is best for: THE WORK, THE CREATOR AND THE PUBLISHER. The ERA referees [as those for this issue] establish no such relationship. They remain anonymous. No dialogue is entered into – the creator is usually 'spoken at' – and in general the referees use the distance of anonymity to adopt an arch and somewhat superior tone when addressing the author of

the work. I have often thought, ‘Wow! I would hate to be examined and/or taught by *this* person!’ I need to say that my work has always been accepted, so these comments are not based on sour grapes – just bemusement that fellow academics could be so harsh and uppity!

... the process is made different because of the attention on a relatively peripheral component of the piece, the exegesis. I’m concerned that the exegesis acts as a distraction for reviewers so that, rather than engaging with a challenging creative piece, they can instead critically evaluate the more familiar medium of an academic abstract.

... the referees focused almost entirely on the research statement, so it was rather like having an academic paper reviewed; but because there was practically no attention paid to the creative work, it wasn’t like having editorial input on a poem.

The editing process, though tough, is always a conversation. It’s more difficult when you don’t have the knowledge of the referee’s background.

*Summary:* These responses represent significant questions raised by our respondents about the double- and single-blind refereeing of creative works. For our collection, the refereeing was double-blind. Under ERA it is single-blind, with reviewers knowing the identity of the authors under review, but writers not having access to the persons conducting the assessments, nor having any right of direct reply or argument with the assessment made. In the creative writing world outside of the ERA processes, the author openly communicates with the editors and publishers of their works. While the ERA assessment process is seen as non-conversational, the current editors did their best to communicate with the contributors and assist with interpretation of the assessments, particularly in cases where the reports were contradictory.

### ***3. Did you write differently for this context, i.e. publication under referee?***

When asked this question, 33% said that they wrote in a ‘different way to normal’. 58% said they wrote how they ‘usually’ write. 8% said that the idea to write differently ‘didn’t occur’ to them. That is, 66% did not change the way they wrote in order to contribute a piece to an ERA-inspired collection. Comments included:

I was working on these pieces already as part of a larger work. The difference is in then articulating how the creative work is research so that others can understand the contribution that creative work makes.

I normally have two modes of writing: what I ironically call ‘inspiration’ writing, where I don’t know where the idea comes from; and ‘application’ writing where I deliberately start off from a theoretical point. This work is an example of the latter.

My concern wasn’t so much with how engaging the creative work was on its own, but instead with how the creative work engaged with the intentions I outlined in the exegesis. So my aim wasn’t to produce the most aesthetically brilliant piece of creative writing, but rather to elucidate creatively a set of theoretical concerns.

*Summary:* Responses here suggest that although most academic writers were continuing with their individual practices for the collection, some were adapting their normal writing process to the imposed demands. A significant proportion (one out of

three), indeed, saw that writing under the ERA system required a different approach to how they might normally write.

#### ***4. Do you think ERA is good for your development as a creative practitioner?***

70% of responses said that the ERA requirements were ‘useful’ to them as a writer. 20% weren’t interested in the question. Only 10% said they thought it was ‘limiting’ their development. This tallies with the result to question 3. above where 66% reported that they were writing as they normally would. Comments included:

... the need to critically evaluate our theoretical concerns as writers makes us more socially, politically and culturally aware.

We can’t let our work be dictated by ERA. It has to be work (research or creative practice) that we think is worth doing and makes a contribution and then we need to articulate this in a way that fits the ERA requirements.

I write *from* my research as much as *for* my research if that makes sense – ERA ... helps me to stitch the two together more overtly but tends to make me concentrate more on ‘safe’ research practices such as textual analysis, or critical work (of others’ writing) as it is easier to justify as research than writing poetry.

I’m somewhere between disinterested and interested, frustrated and encouraged!

*Summary:* A clear percentage of academic writers indicated here that the ERA requirements were useful to their work. In comments, however, writers indicated there was a change of approach needed to make their creative output effective under ERA, and that this was to some extent at least at odds with their progress as creative practitioners.

#### ***5. Do you discern a conflict between your academic duties under ERA and your future as a writer?***

While 45% of respondents positioned ERA as a positive for their writing careers, 9% thought ERA would ‘impede’ their careers as writers, and 45% were less certain. Comments included:

I enjoy and appreciate a rigorous, exegetical reflection upon the creative writing process, however I’m not sure yet of how this might affect the quality of my creative work in the long term. The institutionalisation of an art form is a process fraught with problems; while creative writing research might (hopefully) encourage radical experimentation, the codification of particular practices and methodologies might also produce a set of counter-experimental dogmas or conventions. This would have drastic, negative consequences for the diversity of creative work published by those working in academic institutions.

I find that all my academic duties are in conflict with the writing. Working fulltime as an academic can be all consuming, and so can working on a large creative project so it’s often a struggle. But then I assume this is at least partly the case for all creative writers working fulltime in other jobs.

It won't make much difference to the quality of my writing at this established stage in my career, but it will help to have my creative practice recognised as 'research', so is valuable. In general, universities are still reluctant to accept creative practice as part of research workload for academics.

Ultimately although it is useful to report on my writing that process in itself is talking up my writing time!

*Summary:* It seems that academic creative writers are still making their minds up about the value of ERA to their careers as writers. In this, their point of career – from emerging to established academic researcher – appears to be a significant aspect in relation to their assessment, as is the question of their other academic commitments. The first response recorded above, which articulate concerns about the 'institutionalisation of an art form' being 'fraught with problems', points out the larger ramifications of the process where the requirement for experimentation from university creative writers might produce negative effects.

### ***6. For you, is the idea of writing under ERA seen as confusing?***

This query elicited an interesting response, with a completely clear split in the answers tendered: 50% of respondents reported that ERA did not confuse them, and 50% responded they were either partially or totally confused. The comments on this issue were particularly interesting and included:

I feel that the process was not fully explained at the outset and this is why I was confused. I thought it was a creative piece on its own but realised that it needed a scholarly context after I had written it and submitted it for review. I was then confused about where to put the scholarly writing and was not aware that I had a section at the end for it. This was all added later but it was still a wonderful process and very thought provoking.

I'm still uncertain about the relationship between radical spontaneity, which might often occur outside of the bounds of practice-led research, and exegetical explanation. I also feel that one might need to write differently under ERA: as I mentioned in #3, the emphasis seems to be more on the ability to write an effective exegesis than on a capacity to write a piece that would be publishable in a literary magazine, or in book form, etc. Of course, this has advantages and disadvantages.

Universities are confusing places for creative practitioners – there are always mixed messages and we are constantly having to defend the value of our work.

*Summary:* These responses to this question indicate that the ERA process has not yet been fully explained or 'sold' to creative writing academics, who are divided about a series of issues. These include: how the scheme was introduced; how it currently relates to their creative processes; and how they should continue to perform under its auspices. Others doubt the current scheme will endure and, therefore, the value of engaging deeply with it. Despite the ERA process, some academic writers are also still unsure about how their writing outputs stand in the academy.

**7. Do you think the creative process organically involves the exegetical process?**

75% of the responses we received to this question stated that the exegetical is involved in the creative. 17% did not, however, respond to the question, which means that 37.5% of our survey respondents were either mute on the topic or thought the idea of the exegetical being linked to the creative made no sense. Comments included:

I am perfectly happy to provide an exegetical statement about my work if it suits the context, and to that extent it makes sense to me to do so; but I see it as an arbitrary imperative generated by a particular policy agenda, and without that agenda I would certainly not produce such a statement.

I don't have any problem with the exegetical statement and I quite enjoyed writing it. However such a short statement cannot fully capture the complexities of writing a creative work.

As a writer I always do research but it's not in an exegetical form ... as a writer and an academic, I do/have learnt to develop the exegetical process alongside the creative writing to some extent.

Every writer worth his/her salt must have *some* preparatory notes/research ideas of some description/recorded thoughts and/or drafts before undertaking the final writing process. Why not share them? Sharing only enriches the reader's experience of the artefact produced.

... the act of writing in tandem with an exegetical process does not necessarily produce the best (or most pleasing) piece of creative writing. However, in my own experience the exegetical process encourages a more sophisticated approach to creative writing, which ultimately produces more interesting creative work.

It's a game we play. Even when I write the truth of my research in the statement, it's structured so it feels like a lie.

*Summary:* The responses to this key question, which lies at the heart of the ERA process of creative work as research indicated that several professional issues are involved. These issues include holding one's job in the academy, developing as a writer, feeling authentic and making contact with readers. Creative academics are, it seems, somewhat resistant to the value of recognising the exegetical in their creative processes, but nevertheless acknowledge that there are positives regarding their academic positions, their careers and the sense of authenticity attached to formally developing their awareness of the exegetical in relation to their creative work.

**8. How did you feel about being the referee of your colleagues' work in this TEXT special issue?**

50% of respondents liked refereeing their peers and 33% were 'okay' with it, meaning that 83% saw the process as acceptable. But a high level of respondents, 67%, did not make further comment, either because the question was unproblematic or because it was too sensitive to enter into further. Comments included:

The more refereeing of creative work the better – for me as a writer and for the Writing community in general.

I think that the refereeing should ideally be done by people outside the process altogether. I find the idea of refereeing work by other contributors a bit incestuous, and insufficiently anonymous, though I can understand that it is quite a practical way to proceed.

I enjoy reading other people’s creative work and even their research statements that give some (though limited) insight into their process.

*Summary:* The responses to this question indicate the value for creative academics of refereeing creative works – from both the writer’s and reader’s perspectives – and also the problems inherent in the process. Ideas that the broader creative writing industry should referee our work, or that contributing academics should only be refereed by non-contributing academics are, as the proponent above acknowledges, clearly impractical and unattainable. Many national and international commentators acknowledge the difficulty of finding peer referees for journal articles (for discussion, see Brien, Burr & Webb 2010). While our aim in enlisting contributors as referees was to mobilise the formative role that we hoped reading and reviewing others’ creative work and research statements would play for academic writers, the positive response to involvement in the refereeing process by the pool of contributors overall is an indication of the commitment of these academic writers to the process. On this aspect, we can report that the referees not only largely responded generously and fulsomely, but also certainly more rapidly than to some other issues of *TEXT*.

### ***9. What was your feedback to colleagues mainly aimed at?***

Responses to this question were fairly evenly distributed: 29% focused on the creative piece in its own right; 21% focused on the creative piece under ERA requirements; and 33% reported that the research statement occupied their attention. Comments summarised the considerable variation in approaches:

I viewed the whole submission as a thing-in-itself and endeavoured to respond equally to the creative and the critical elements.

Both the writers whose work I refereed seemed to have an issue with writing the research statement. In both cases the research statement was seemingly hurried, vague and lacking the scholarship of writing. Both writers ... produced meaningful creative artifacts yet seemed to consider the writing of the research statement a nuisance and beneath their dignity.

I didn’t feel that the research statement was substantial enough to be the focus of much comment, so I concentrated instead on the creative piece. Being aware of the ERA requirements led me to focus on questions of innovation and contribution: ie. “What innovations does this piece offer to the practice of creative writing and/or creative writing research?” Such questions necessarily led me to favour the experimental, rather than the conventional, aspects of the creative works.

*Summary:* An interesting contrast exists between how academic writers reported that they wrote for this ERA-inspired journal issue and how they provided referee feedback for it. In their responses to 3. above, 66% said they did not write differently for this exercise, but no more than half of those treated the creative work of others as ‘normal’ creative products in the refereeing process. The responses to this question indicate that creative academics may, perhaps, provide an unpredictable commentary in the assessment of others’ contributions. That is, while they do not necessarily referee according to the impulses from which they themselves write, they also referee with an awareness of the ERA requirements for innovation in creative writing as research.

## Conclusion

Much can be concluded from the actions and responses of the creative writers who engaged in this project by contributing work to *TEXT*'s special issue, refereeing the work of their fellow authors and responding to our survey about this project and the ERA processes more generally. First and foremost, perhaps, is that creative writing academics are interested in sharing their work by publishing in such a space. This interest overrode any reservations regarding aspects of the processes of both the special issue in particular and ERA more generally. Creative writing academics are largely generous reviewers, offering formative as well as summative evaluations that many recipients felt to be of significant use in improving their work. There is, however, considerable uncertainty, anxiety, distrust and, perhaps contributing and/or due to this, a significant level of confusion, about the ERA (both its goals and processes) among the creative writing academics who responded to our survey. There was also little agreement regarding how the ERA exercise relates to either the value of creative writing as a creative art and its products *per se*, or its effectiveness in the community, the nation or the world. Despite this, it appears that creative writers are flexible and, indeed, creative enough, to work out how to utilise the form and requirements of the ERA to enhance their own practice, even if they do not fully embrace it. There is, clearly, also considerable space for much more investigation into this mode of evaluation and its effects on the products of creative writing and the other creative arts that it seeks to assess.

## Endnote

1. Document sent as survey of creative writing academics for *TEXT Special Issue No 15*:

Dear colleagues

Thank you for filling in this quick survey. We seek your responses to the following 10 multiple-choice questions as part of writing our introductory article for the *TEXT Special Issue No 15*, to which you are a contributor. Comments would be greatly appreciated. All responses and comments will be treated anonymously in our summary. Please send back to [nlkrauth@gmail.com](mailto:nlkrauth@gmail.com).

With warmest wishes, Nigel & Donna

**i) Being refereed**

**1) How did you like having your creative work refereed for this *TEXT* Special Issue?**

- I enjoyed it
- I'm okay with it
- I disliked it
- I'm undecided

Comment, if you wish:.....

**2) Is having your creative work refereed similar to being edited by a publisher/editor?**

- Yes, very much so
- It's somewhat like it
- No, it's quite unlike

Comment, if you wish:.....

**ii) Writing process**

**3) Did you write differently for this context, i.e. publication under referee?**

- Yes, I wrote in a different way to normal
- No, I wrote how I usually write
- The idea to write differently didn't occur to me

Comment, if you wish:.....

**4) Do you think ERA is good for your development as a creative practitioner?**

- Yes, ERA requirements are useful to me as a writer
- No, ERA requirements are limiting to me as a writer
- The question doesn't really interest me

Comment, if you wish:.....

**5) Do you discern a conflict between your academic duties under ERA and your future as a writer?**

- Yes, ERA requirements will impede my career as a writer
- No, ERA requirements will enhance my career as a writer
- I'm uncertain about it
- The question hasn't really occurred to me

Comment, if you wish:.....

**6) For you, is the idea of writing under ERA seen as confusing?**

- Yes, ERA requirements confuse me
- No, ERA requirements don't confuse me
- I'd say I'm partially confused

Comment, if you wish:.....

**7) Do you think the creative process organically involves the exegetical process?**

- Yes, it makes sense to me as a writer to provide an exegetical statement about my work
- No, it does not make sense to me as a writer to provide an exegetical statement about my work
- This question annoys me

Comment, if you wish:.....

**iii) Refereeing others**

**8) How did you feel about being the referee of your colleagues' work in this *TEXT* Special Issue?**

- I enjoyed it
- I'm okay with it
- I disliked it
- I'm undecided

Comment, if you wish:.....

**9) What was your feedback to colleagues mainly aimed at?**

- their creative writing piece in its own right
- their creative writing piece under ERA requirements
- their research statement

Comment, if you wish:.....

**iv) Overall**

**10) Do you have any other remarks about...**

- ERA and your work?
- the Creative Writing as Research Special Issues which *TEXT* is publishing? (e.g. Are they useful? How often should we do them? Etc)

Comment:.....

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