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Roll Out the Big Canon: A Subjective Academic Narrative

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Abstract

Following a brief survey of creative writing vs literary studies, and looking at both in relationships to social networking sites, in this paper, I consider the ways in which we assume that some personal writing is 'creative'. In doing so, I question the use of literature as a model for creative writing. At the same time I canvass the necessity for wide reading as a basis for creative writing. I suggest that the subjective self is inadequate as a singular basis for creative writing and that the author is stirring from the deathbed not to attain the position of the 'god' but rather to provide leadership in a world obsessed with the subjective self as data. In doing so, I look at some the technology of the present assessing some electronic implications of the death of the author and the birth of the subjective self, at social networking and/as creative writing, and at warnings about the power of the culture industry. Finally, rather plaintively, I call for rolling back out the big canon itself. My theoretical framework of narrativity and the subjective academic narrative is shown as another paradox within this discussion.

Keywords: Narrativity; literary studies; creative writing; e-discourse

Introduction

In this paper I look at the influence of technology on the expression of the subjective self. This paper also explores ways in which my own 'voice' comes through within a mystorical model that forms the basis for my own proposed 'subjective academic narrative'? The authentic voice of the writer is involved in multiplicities in a many-layered text. Indeed, as Roland Barthes has it: 'The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.' (1977:142-3)

I have taught literature at secondary school and tertiary level for over 45 years. This has always contained an element of creative writing for the students to express themselves unrelated to literary texts, but since 2002 with the establishment of the MA(Writing) at Swinburne University of Technology and the subsequent PhD by artefact and exegesis, I have taught exclusively in the writing area. (Arnold 2005; 2007) In the late 20th century, Literary Studies in many Australian universities became challenged as outdated expressions of a collective common good: the

canon (Eagleton1989). Roland Barthes's famous dictum 'the author as god is dead' became a shortened statement of fact: 'the author is dead' There is a significant difference, but it signalled that the reader, once freed from the dictums of the canon, could self-canonise and become a 'creative writer' him or herself.

I think that most of us now teaching creative writing in universities come from a traditional literary studies background, but are also practitioners of creative writing. In bringing practice into the academy, the first goal that we had to meet was to establish such practicum writing as an academic discipline, and this remains an on-going struggle within many traditional universities. So we emphasised doing writing itself as an academic skill comparable to studying published writing, particularly that of the 'greats'. This struggle both came about and was supported by the postmodernist rejection of the authority of the literary canon. The importance of the subjective self in narration, whatever its genre,

was emphasised. No longer, for example, was even literary studies based on such traditional literary questions as the intentions of the author, the creative establishment of plot, dialogue and characterisation, or any of the ways in which the reader was directed, as it were, by the expertise of the author in this writing. Instead everything became a 'text' that was always 'under erasure' (Derrida 1982) and hence could (perhaps must) be written and re-written through each reading. If this was so for literary writing, it was so for all forms of writing each of which is in its own way 'creative'.

Literature as a Model for Creative Writing

The dichotomy once presented, established and maintained has supported the growing popularity of creative writing courses over literary studies courses on the part of both students and staff in Australian universities. There has been some attempt to address this and to overcome this dichotomy through elements of literary studies being applied in creative writing courses. In this scenario, published authors' works become models for the students to study and emulate. This gives us a comfortable way to retain literary studies as a handmaiden of writing courses: something that I rejected in my own formulation and development of the Master of Arts (Writing) and the establishment of the PhD by artefact and exegesis for my university. Why? Perhaps because I am a writer. I thoroughly agree with Gerard Manley Hopkins, surely one of the most creative writers in the history of literature, who says of this relationship: 'The effect of studying masterpieces is to make me admire and do otherwise. So it must be on every original artist to some degree, on me to a marked degree' (1956:207)

At the same time, I do think that reading in any chosen genre and perhaps more particularly across genres can only enhance a writer's knowledge of the possibilities of her or his own writing.

Tolstoy's view

As, thanks to man's capacity to express thoughts by words, every man may know all that has been done for him in the realms of thought by all humanity before his day, and can in the present, thanks to this capacity to understand the thoughts of others, become a sharer in their activity and can himself hand on to his contemporaries and descendants the thoughts he has assimilated from others, as well as those which have arisen within himself; so, thanks to man's capacity to be infected with the feelings of others by means of art, all that is being lived through by his contemporaries is accessible to him, as well as the feelings experienced by men thousands of years ago, and he has also the possibility of transmitting his own feelings to others. http://www.csub.edu/~jvancamp/361r14.html Such comments as this from Tolstoy certainly wouldn't make it on twitter: they are dense observations of practice and they make demanding reading. The idea that a piece of creative work as something that demands a great deal of thought and ability as well as perseverance and solidly-founded insightful self- criticism is something that is difficult to see in the proliferation of creative writing courses. Rather, they too often seem to promise, or at least are founded upon the premise, that a writer can be made from any student of writing.

Wide Reading as a Basis for Creative Writing

Although I would never use another's writing as a model in teaching writing, I would encourage this wide reading. So, do we really have to choose between them? If we do is it because one is somehow less demanding than the other (you guess which)? Nicole Cooley sees that '…creative writing and literary studies can invigorate one another as

pedagogical theories and practices' (2003:99) This is a useful assertion only if we see that the relationship must validate each and not utilise literary (and other) works merely or even largely as models. Creative writing curricula do not exclude literary studies and at least some of our subjects at Swinburne cover many elements of that skill. At the same time, we do not utilise such literature as models for students to follow, nor do we study the texts with the same intent and intensity that one would find in literary studies.

'Wide reading does two things- it extends knowledge and it adjusts the judgement' is Gerard Manley Hopkins's view of reading in a letter to Robert Bridges in 1888 (1956:207): For me as a writer and teacher of writing who recently taught Literary Studies, the relationship of reader and writer is one of the attributes that is at the heart of the growth of courses in creative writing over courses in literary studies in our universities. Interest in expressing the subjective self and the self as data are the core of this transition. The rise of interest in autoethnography signals this self-absorption. I am not at odds with this as such: but I am concerned that it too often has no solid literary foundation behind its practice.

The move towards the writing by/of self as expert was concurrently introduced to the reader of literature as the concept of writing the text as s/he reads became a central postmodernist theme. It is a small step from this to a confidence that the reader as writer of literature is also a creative person who has not only something important to say, but a right to be heard (Kirkman 2002; Perry 2007).

The Author Stirs from the Deathbed
After the postmodernist interference with the authority of the text and the writerly-reader' being established over the author, I think that the 'writerly-reader' has become the 'writer' of the text in a more direct and arguably even

authoritative way than literary studies permits or that the postmodern freedom from **author**ity foresaw.

In the second part of the 20th century, ideas about textuality and discourse moved from literary studies into other areas of the social sciences. In particular, they proposed that all elements of culture were constructed, were stories, and were able to be 'read' as well as 'written '. Moreover, they could be read 'against' so that the reader was involved in the production of the text and did not act as a supine receptor of an authoritative dictate. The authority of writing, and hence cultural constructs, was challenged and it was proposed that a dispersal of certainties was central to inscriptions of all kinds. Thus, what it leads to in the first few decades of the 21st century is of great interest.

I think that some unrealistic expectations have arisen that throw a new light upon the discourse about literary theory that has built upon Roland Barthes's famous statement that the author as god is dead and the reader is writing the text. Conclusions, ideas and theories arising from the work of the latter part of the 20th century characterised by Jacques Derrida and largely under the umbrella of postmodernism were arrived at prior to the conceptualisation, electronic development and colonisation of cyberspace. Today, for example, we have a very different sense of what it is to author the self online and to act as the 'readerly-writer' of cybertexts. Interactive multimedia authoring, presentation and global publication tools enable the subjective self: they do not necessarily support reading other writers, much less the canon.

Some electronic implications of developing the writerly-reader and/as the subjective self
Like blogs, Facebook and T.V. reality shows, the subjective self has become the authority in

creativity. The careful construction of creative works by the artist has been overcome by the narrative of self without this creative ability, heart or urge and certainly without the knowledge that creativity itself brings to the work. There is much inanity in these constructions of self online, on the page, through twitter, in electronic games and autobiographies. Perhaps this is best describes by twitter only being available to a very limited number of letters.

Electronic games present another interesting example of this where, due to interactive multimedia elements, players come to believe that they actually have and experience that having of multiple unrealisable attributes that are displayed at their behest upon the screen. These may vary from leaping across otherwise insurmountable spaces to playing a musical instrument or acting as a dolphin in the sea. They are in control of the text. They are writing the text. They are experiencing the text. It is going forward at their command: they are enacting the writerly-reader. Caveat: they can actually do none of these things in the real world that are so easy in the cyberworld.

Such multimedia presentations have replaced word vocabularies with visual, aural and interactive capacities. Most literary studies courses rely upon verbal texts. Before the communications revolution of the late 20th and early 21st century, which is still developing apace, it was a given that adults speaking English as their first language could understand up to 40,000 words and regularly used over 5,000. (Arnold 1984) In a recent newspaper report, (Griffiths & Gourlay. 2010) the concern of Professor Tom McEnery, a linguistic professor at Lancaster University is noted. He is reported as studying adolescent word use and finding the vocabulary as low as 800 regularly used words and that 'the top 20 words being used by teenagers, including "yeah", "no" and "but" account for about one-third of the words used.' Jean Gross, 'the British government's adviser on childhood language is planning a national campaign to prevent children failing in the classroom and the workplace because they cannot express themselves.' This change in the vocabulary habits occurs as the formal education level of young adults is increasing: if they are writing themselves into being or acting as 'readerly-writers' of a text, we must surely take this into account.

This sense of the subjective self expressing self as a priority is now a part of cyber expectations. Literary Studies demand something quite different from the reader. There is an established and well-constructed series of actions that must be undertaken: first, one must be ready to read widely and deeply of materials that are quite demanding in themselves. These may be historical, as in a study of the works of Chaucer or Defoe, or contemporary as in reading Umberto Eco-as - novelist and not theorist. They are works to which you must come as an alert and intellectual reader.

They are works to which you must bring some knowledge, some insights, and concerns other than the presentation of the subjective self. Moreover, they are works about which you are being asked to develop an informed critical opinion. This opinion is to be sharpened by sharing it with others of like mind and also by developing quite long critical essays that investigate the works within an academic framework proposed and developed by the reader.

The technology of the present and creative writing

Behind podcasting is the electronic construction of self that seems to be unrestricted by business systems, political licences and company policies. The technology of computerisation involves

interactions in the virtual reality of cyberspace and enables Creative writers in the 21st century may well feel that they are at the centre of the web of knowledge and developing creative abilities. Once they were peripheral: they were drawn in through the gatekeepers of knowledge. They are under immense pressure to construct themselves as individuals in cyberspace. Virtual reality provides them with multiple inputs that include twitter, chatrooms, mobile/i phones and T.V., radio, pod/blog/vlog etc casting.

This occurs without the assuredness of a definitive and established cultural construction: we all know that everything can be digitally altered. For example, programs such as photoshop allow the creation of indivualised reality photographs. These new programs enable the manipulation of images in ways that the still or filmic cameras have not permitted. Actual photographs can be manipulated, but virtual reality pictures can also appear as lifelike experiences that our own natural life tells us are too extraordinary to be real. These special effects that rely for their creation on algorithms rather than lived experiences appear to produce a new understanding of ourselves as humans.

Such synthetic photographs and visuals draw upon our cultural belief in the reality of the pictorial record. This is encompassed in the saying that 'one picture is worth a thousand words' that underpins traditional photography and cultural experiences such as the television news. Goran Sonesson calls this a 'truth witness' view of photography that validates our reception of synthesized hyper-real visual texts. He foresees a time, probably now with us, that '…*the synthetic picture becomes as common as the photograph; then we will be forced to abandon this more and more improbable presupposition of the existence of a previous relation of proximity between the motive and the picture.'* (1998(b): 2) That time has come. It can be clearly seen in its predominance in electronic games. The appearance of reality enacted through the interactivity involved in computer games and the manipulation of images is becoming a significant experience of not only dedicated gamesters. The manipulation of images is the basis of

electronic games playing. This experience of virtual reality is compelling. In games, the player experiences a reality that is only accessible through electronic media. Such hyper-reality is also experienced as a three dimensional pictorial yet real interactivity.

Creative Writing And/As Social Networking
We are all familiar with the need to have a group of friends and the support of family. After all, we all came originally from tribes, and in many ways we reproduce that particularly through sporting affiliations, clubs and organisations. Storytelling and narratives are basic to human communications. Such stories situated humans within their cultural and social domains: they answered questions and explores ideas either directly or through metaphor. They were, perhaps, the virtual experiences of all peoples. Today, the most compelling use of narrative on the internet is to reveal the subjective self through social networking**.**

Cheryl Coyle and Heather Vaughn describe online social networking as an updated aspect of this need to share our stories: 'social networks exist because humans are societal and require relationships with other humans to survive.' (2008:12) For them social networking online is 'technologically mediated communication' that their study shows to be a way of keeping in touch with already known networks of friends rather than trawling to find new ones. 'College students use Facebook for social search i.e to find people already known or introduced offline' (2008:14) Their study showed that users 'are not generally communicating with unknown others who shared similar interests…rather, they are using them as a form of entertainment and to stay connected with people they already know' (2008:15). A 2007 statistic showed that Myspace dominates teenagers online networking 'nearly 80% of 12-17 year olds use Myspace at least weekly (M2PressWire. July 13. 2007). these sites are used for a variety of

self-expression including connected community groups; sharing Popular culture particularly music, creative expression and, above all, to share life experiences. (http://www.comscore.com

Today, mobile phones give access to a wide range of social networking sites as gateway providers. (M2PressWire. Feb. 14. 2007) Perhaps the most used of these is Twitter. This provides a free but limited social networking, instant messaging utility for people to stay connected in real time http://apiwiki.twitter.com/

The 'e' certainly involves the production of self. It blurs the historical distinctions between fictional and real representations: '…*the real itself and its ethnographic or sociological representations are…fictions, albeit powerful ones that we do not experience as fictions but as true.'* (Gordon 1997:11). Once we went to the creative arts, to philosophy and even psychology to try to understand our human condition. Today we gaze at 'reality' shows where individuals seek to be seen so as to affirm their existence. Why is this? Ian Buchanan (2001) says that one reason is a kind of perverse feel-good: *'...reality T.V.… however much it warms us and makes us feel good inside in actuality sheds no light.'* (pp1) At the same time, he argues that it's not mere voyeurism that attracts us, but rather a 'concretization' of our fantasies of privation, boredom, and the thrill of feeling horrified about someone else. *'We turn on the TV not to watch people starve so much as to bask in the reflected warmth of their longing gaze-their unrequited but omnipresent desire for everything we have to hand that until we imagined we didn't have it seemed utterly banal is what we enjoy the most.' (pp2)*

Today, even when watching TV with the program selector in hand, our Western students understand as well as come from a different cultural text from any that has ever existed previously: that is the electronic text

leading to virtual reality. It challenges us to a new understanding of what it is to be creative

Creative Writing and the Culture Industry

In 1944, in their identification and discussion of the culture industry, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer indicated how mass culture stamped out by the culture industry acts as a kind of manufacturer of sameness. They call this '…the rhythm of the iron system.' (pp1) saying that it results in the dumbing-down of its recipients, whatever its claims to individuality or creativity of expression for/by the individual. This ubiquity of content and impact is not itself purposeless. It is manipulated by the people at the top who hold the greatest economic powers.

Perhaps the most instructive e-interaction is that of 'look at me live on the computer' clearly seen in blogging. Cultural ideologies that are distinctly Western dominate the text and discourse of blogging. Presentation, references, interpretations, and perceptions of both the blogger and the imagined and real reader are within the cultural domain and dominance of western ideologies as they form, inform and perform the self. This supports the contention that sociocultural signification systems are inherent within the self: even when we critique or analyse those very dominant influences, we are also subject to them. Perhaps we are most subject to them when we become authors of the self online. This self may well be shallow, banal, uninformed, working at the most basic level of thinking, without any formal or even informal education: yet it has replaced the canon of literary studies.

What is creative writing?

In 'notes 1864' (1956:95) Hopkins says:
It is a happy thing there is no royal road
to poetry. The world should know by
this time that one cannot reach
Parnassus except by flying thither. Yet

from time to time more men go up and either perish in its gullies flying excelsior flags or else come down again with full folios and blank countenances.

I don't personally think that you can teach people to be creative writers: there is such an internal paradox here that it can never be resolved in ordering someone to go away and follow these formulae, possibilities, hints, models, templates and 'be creative'. However, I do believe that in writing courses we can enable people to develop their craft and to establish confidence in themselves as knowledgeable about writing, reading, theory, textuality and discourse. In doing so, we can establish that all modes of writing are creative in themselves. Thus, for me, creative writing classes are about supporting such skills as the writers-to-be bring to them rather than proposing that creative writers, particularly in the sense of making literature, are developed by or through them.

Creative writing is based on self discovery, self-expression, and conflict resolution within the subjective self: it is dominated by one's own desires and yearnings to be seen and heard, to be understood and to understand. From this basis come other skills. The creative writer has no chance to do otherwise than s/he does. We come to literature and literary writers to find out more about this.

It is through reading literature that we can imaginatively confront our humanity with its strengths and flaws in a way that is not available outside of fiction. I am thinking particularly of 'Frankenstein' that has never been out of print since its first publication in and that has inspired countless other writers, film-makers, gamesters and creative imaginative works. Why? It explores the dominance of science in modern community. Nowhere else can we so readily confront our uneasy relationship with science and medical

technology including, for example, the implications of gene technology. There has been a long interest in vampires, but today there is a massive upsurge of this in popular media. Again, we can look at our own hidden and obscure desires, urges, needs, values and so on without actually experiencing in reality vampire urges. Throughout the media in the late 20th and early 21st century, there has been a growing interest in the mass media about murders from the relatively genteel Agatha Christie to the ubiquitous 'Midsomer Murders'. However, there has also been a considerable step away from these reassuring storylines to a dark forensic interest in which murders have become more and more violent, obsessive and fantastical in their revelations of the potential darkness of the human soul.

Of course we go to literature for other reasons: to learn about magic realism, adolescent feelings, Indigenous storylines, adventures of the spirit, small-mindedness and so-on endlessly: all of the time reading about others to learn about ourselves as well. We also come from literature into the discourse of texts that are not literary and may even be such seeming anomalies as electronic games or streets as I have myself written 'Reading the Streets: The relationship of built spaces with social practices.' (Arnold 2009)

There are many books about how writers write, as well as about how to write if you want to become a writer. They all deal with 'voice' and they all fail to explain/capture/enrapture a writer. (Grenville1990; Strunk and White2000; Woolfe and Grenville 1993; Phelan 2000)

There are oppositional points to mine about using literary models in writing classes. For example, Cooley sees the search for/expression of individual voice in creative writing courses as problematical. This is particularly so as she teaches a broad underprivileged demographic. Unlike myself, she calls upon the utilisation of literary texts as models to enable writing that is

opens up textuality for her creative writing students in a way that enables them to claim their diverse backgrounds and hence voices. 'I am advocating a textually based creative writing class in which students read other texts as models for their own work. Discussion of literary texts is the site on which we stage the issues and teach our ways of reading for workshop. One way to ensure that students are open to the idea that textuality is varied and multiple is to teach works outside the Anglo-American tradition. Expanding the definition of literature in the direction of comparative literature would be useful.' (2001:102)

For me, the study of literature is -and must be- so much more than a model to be explored in creative writing classes. Not only does it make us more than we could ever be by ourselves, it is through literary studies that the theories of textuality and discourse have become available to us both in theory and practice. Umberto Eco's *'The Name of The Rose'* is a wonderful example of this as fiction while his theoretical writing in, for example, brings literary theory into a dynamic role in the study of literature. It is this aspect of literary study that I have found important in the courses I teach and in the exegesis and artefact practice led research that my PhD students develop as well as in my own understanding of the intersection of writing, reading and teaching literature.

Theoretical framework for my thinking
Paradoxically enough, in terms of this paper and its debate, my own academic methodology has developed from the restrictive formulae of traditional academic writing into what I call 'the subjective academic narrative'. This recognises that as a teacher for over 45 years, and a writer published in many genres with over 50 major books and many articles, I bring to the academic world multiple stories of self in relationship to teaching and learning and the academy.

Through this lived experience, I see all textuality and discourse as a created story, a narrative of some kind. This is a very postmodernist and feminist position. In my academic thinking, then, I have attempted to bridge the gap I've found still exists between 'real' methodology and 'other' by working towards and within the articulation of a practice of academic writing as 'the subjective academic narrative'. In this process, I don't attempt to solve the old 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' debate/dilemma. Rather, I utilise the stress of its paradoxical being to energise new ways of thinking. The aim is to enable tired research paradigms and debates to be short-circuited by accepting difference. This means the production of new discourse models as well as new content. (Arnold 2005) I have written widely upon this methodology (2010).

Maggie Kirkman speaks of narrativity as 'essentially interdisciplinary' and describes it as including description; understanding; meaning; language and symbols; particulars; individuals and the study of people in their cultural context. ..The Narrative mode …takes account of context and intentions through the stories constructed to make sense of human experience. (2002:30). I go further to say that all of the work that we do to make sense of human existence is a narrative. Kirkman would probably dispute this as she distinguishes two modes of knowledge production: 'paradigmatic reasoning, the traditional understanding of thought as logical induction, dealing in principles abstracted from context' and 'the narrative mode, which takes account of context and intentions through stories constructed to make sense of human experience'. (2002:30) I aver that both modes are narrative in nature: they are both stories that concur with Gregory Ulmer's 'mystory. Ulmer (1989) identifies a 'mystorical' approach to thinking and research. A 'mystory' reveals the academic text to be sewn together as a compilation of the scholarly, the anecdotal or popular, and the

autobiographical. It questions the dominant analytico-referential model of knowledge. (Arnold) In literary studies, narrative theory has come see narrative as able to 'represent a fundamental process of human understanding' (Kirkman 2002:31).

This process is present in all aspects of knowledge, and the division between paradigmatic modes' and 'narrative modes' is one that I believe benefits by being put under erasure. The dialogic construction of narratives that speak to us of humanity is surely present in scientific modes of thinking as well as literary ones. If we can deconstruct the binary of qualitative and quantitative we may be able to see that all narratives are cultural constructs dominated by the input of the world in which we are formed and in which we live. A medical example of this is the way in which Chinese medical knowledge has in the late 20th and early 21st century moved from the risible to the acceptable to Western medical practitioners so much so that acupuncture needles are used for pain and nausea control in patients undergoing surgery. 'Recent evidence suggests that manual acupuncture is effective for reducing preoperative anxiety and for postoperative pain relief.' Chan 2006: 303.

Is Stein up to the canon?

In her brilliant study of Gertrude Stein and Alice B Toklas, Janet Malcolm avers (and cites other Stein scholars who agree) that Gertrude Stein is in many ways the unsung genius of pre-postmodernism. Stein's understanding of the frailty of words to convey with any fullness a sense of reality combines with her understanding of their poetic power and strength. In such a scenario, Stein walks the rim of this paradox, using the energy of these 2 aspects to act as a dynamo for her work. Malcolm also claims that Stein's work has not been as influential as it ought to have been because of the dilatory nature of the Stein scholar Katz. His intensive insights, interviews

and notes on Stein's diaries and Toklas's insights have still not been published several decades after his ground-breaking doctorate.

After Stein's death, her notebooks were recovered by Katz in the Yale library in an unopened parcel. He was exhilarated and talked to Toklas for many hours annotating them. This work, done in November 1952 to February 1953 'eight hours a day, four days a week' (141) has never been published. As a result, he is the ultimate Stein scholar with significant material that he will not make available to anyone. The little that he has revealed in his published dissertation Malcolm sees as revealing 'Stein's hatefulness' (149). Katz avoided an interview with Malcolm.

Stein scholars she cites are very angry with Katz's failure of scholarship that has gone on for over 60 years. Malcolm herself is more understanding: 'he is afraid I would steal his narrative' (170). She asks the Stein scholars why they are so angry with Katz, the reply is that Katz's work would have placed Steins massive 'The Making of Americans' on American college reading lists: she would have entered into the canon of great American writers. 'They feel that the surge of criticism necessary to propel the work into the academic canon would have followed upon the publication of the annotated notebooks' (173). Malcolm elucidates here the work of academic criticism. Her own reflections and examples throughout this biography are an outstanding contribution to academic knowledge.

This brings me to the matter of scholarly discourse and the importance of engaging with it so as to develop an ever-growing network of academic insights and understandings as I illustrate here with my interactions with Malcolm.

Dealing with words so as to make subtle meanings is an intricate and slippery business. This is especially so in the academy where too often academic management ambitions

unrelated to scholarship or practice dominate. Too often fragile egos and minor talents can stand in the way of respecting-sometimes even citing- others' works.

'The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas' is, of course, Stein's own autobiography artfully projected in this pretence in which '…she not only achieved the vulgar celebrity she craved but brilliantly solved the koan of autobiography by disclaiming responsibility for the one being written' (Malcolm 2007:13) Malcom notes that this work is written with the reader in mind but that in the later *'Everybody's Autobiography'* Stein 'no longer feels constrained to attend to the reader's wants. She reverts to her old way of writing as if the reader were an uninvited guest arriving on the wrong night at a dark house (17). She is concerned, Malcolm says, to shape a narrative of life by presenting it 'in all its elusive ambiguity' (17).

Like Dr Johnson and James Boswell, Toklas acts to support Stein in her largely unappreciated self-described genius. (41) She also interferes. In one case, Malcolm identifies how she changed the 'mays' in a poem to 'cans' because of Toklas's jealousy at an earlier love affair she had with a May Book Staver! Moreover, the very crossing-out and replacement is vicious and even vitriolic.

Stein herself is the 'voice' and force of her work: 'I mean, I mean, I know what I mean' (184) She says of her intractable determination to write as she wishes. For Malcolm, this makes new words entering into Stein's repetitive and confined vocabulary enter the long and difficult to read 'The Making of Americans' '…like the entrance of a new character' (136). This is a very powerful evocation of the word moving beyond de Saussure's signifier and signification and opening up a very fresh way to look at vocabulary. Malcolm describes Stein's process as 'transcribing rather than transforming thought as she writes, making a kind of literal

translation of what is going on in her mind…before they turn into standard stale expressions' (137). Hence, in reading Stein, she states '…every writer who lingers over Stein's sentences is apt to feel a little stab of shame over the heedless predictability of his (sic) own' (137) Stein herself says of her writing: 'using a word I have not yet been using in my writing is to me a very difficult and peculiar feeling' (136)

In this biography, Malcolm provides many interesting models for academics as well as biographers. She says, for example, 'the minor characters of biography, like their counterparts in fiction, are less tenderly treated than the major character. The writer uses them to advance his (sic) narrative and carelessly drops them when they have performed their function' (205). She then self-alludes to exemplify this in her own work as Stein and Toklas's biographer.

She excuses using 'actual 3 dimensional people' in this way because '…the biographer is writing a life not lives, and to keep himself (sic) on course must cultivate a bond of narcissism on behalf of his subject that blinds him to the full humanity of anyone else' (205-6). Whilst both Stein and Toklas have their due in Malcolm's biography 'there was certainly Stein's ego and interactivity with Toklas as alter ego' (223)

I am not a Stein scholar, but Malcolm's works sent me to Stein, and I do not regret reading her persuasive and innocent prose that is yet redolent with sophistication.

Conclusion

This paper explores ways in which my own 'voice' comes through within a mystorical model that forms the basis for my own proposed 'subjective academic narrative'? The authentic voice of the writer is involved in multiplicities in a many-layered text. Indeed, as

Roland Barthes has it: 'The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.' (1977:142-3) Teaching literary studies; teaching creative writing: Are the two not only complementary but necessarily so? It is a truism that creative writing classes are replacing the systematic study of published and well-critiqued writers. This systematic study is itself under dispute: just how do you study the work of an author when the author as god is dead? Certainly there is no longer that enervating expectation that you would try to discover the author's intentions, his or her 'messages' arising from literary gifts and sensitivities not available to the uninitiated receptive reader. At the same time, any writing is not necessarily useful or even interesting. We can only understand how to value and evaluate our writing and that of our students if we are well-read in the genres of writing that we are practising.

My thinking about this paper produces insights for me into the production of verbal sense-making leading to information, knowledge and possibly even wisdom. 'A rose is a rose is a rose' I understand in those 3 ways, but this is not enough. In taking the privileged academic discourse forward, we are constructing a knowledge act with spaces for possibilities from a deconstructive site. Clever witty intellectual wordplay, however appealing, is just not enough. Deconstructing this semiotic minimalism, this linguistic intellectual selfishness has lead somewhere: to a new chaos. Every point of chaos has new possibilities. What can we make of this? Where can it go? Kathryn Hales says 'chaos is the womb of life, not its tomb' () . What, however, if we bring nothing to the navigation of such chaos than tweets and texts? What if we have no memory bank other than how to navigate an iphone or the internet? 'a phone is a phone is a phone' how can this be true when we have seen such changes over even the last couple of years?

I'm suggesting that we roll out the canon again: yes, the big guns of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Donne Dickens etc.The goal? To take the cyber somewhere else in literary education. To take the subjective self as author into a realisation that this is a co-creation not a dominant nor subordinate readerly position to be fought against blogs, texts, (etc) of almost meaningless vacuity. There is something to work WITH when we can go to Canterbury accompanied by storytellers, when we can hear Lady Macbeth warn Duncan not to hear the bell; when we can recite Portia's self-serving Mercy speech or when we meet Miss Haversham amidst the crumbling wedding feast. Let us act as though the novel is not dead, as though the author as writer is alive, as though the reader has something to learn as well as contribute. Let us act as though the literary canon offers us much to study, learn and understand about the work as well as about ourselves, our own humanity.

If we feed our young on a mess of pottage, we force them to give up an unknown and unacknowledged birthright. We should respect their creativity and abilities so much that we should give them the best foundations we can offer them and that's not the ability to play games, to founder in online social media and information as though it's knowledge and even wisdom, to blog, text, or understand and develop and use elements of reality TV and social networking sites. Roll out the canon too, I say!

William Blake - The Sick Rose

O Rose, thou art sick!
The Invisible worm,
That flies in the night,
In the howling storm,

Has found out thy bed
Of Crimson joy;
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.

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