

RHETORICAL MODES AT PLAY: AN EXERCISE IN LITERARY AND CREATIVE WRITING RESEARCH PRACTICE EXPLORED

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Abstract

This paper examines the complexity of fictocritical writing as a form which draws together creative writing, literary and cultural theory, and self-reflexive writing to create a hybrid text as a scholarly genre in research. Encouraging students to combine creative and critical work in literary studies or in writing courses, allows them to build a bridge between ways of responding to texts which are traditionally taught and assessed as two distinct forms. The paper uses the example of an undergraduate student's Honours thesis as a catalyst for discussing the nature of fictocritical writing. Fictocritical work as a scholarly genre offers different possibilities for combining theoretical and creative approaches to responding to and producing texts; it offers a bridge between the creative and theoretical in research, either in the discipline of creative writing or in literary studies.

Key words: Creative Writing, Literary Studies, Fictocritical writing.

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Woods, C. (2010). Rhetorical Modes at Play: an exercise in literary and creative writing research practice explored. LI – Educational Studies in Language and Literature, 10(2),1-18. <https://doi.org/10.17239/LIESLL-2010.10.02.03>

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Chinese

[Translation Shek Kam Tse]

《在玩乐中作出回馈：一个发展文学与创意写作研究的例子》

摘要：

批判式小说写作（fictocritical

writing）将创意写作、文学、文化理论及个人反思这些元素调和，建构出新的文字，本文探讨这种文章的复杂性，如何足以让它在研究中，成为学术上认可的一种文体。在文学研究或写作课堂内，鼓励学生将创意写作及评论写作结合，能够让他们联系两种在传统上教学及评估方法都大相径庭的文体。本文以一名本科生的荣誉论文作触媒，讨论批判式小说写作的本质。运用批判式小说写作作为学术文体，能够以结合理论及创意的方式，为响应及文字创作提供更多可能性。同时能在创意写作及文化研究两门学科中，创造桥梁，衔接研究中的创意和理论。

Dutch

[Translation Tanja Janssen]

TITEL. Retorische vormen in het spel: Een oefening in literair en creatief schrijven als wetenschappelijk genre geëxploreerd

SAMENVATTING. Dit artikel gaat in op de complexiteit van ‘fictocritical’ schrijven. Dit is een vorm van schrijven waarin creatief schrijven, literaire en culturele theorie en zelf-reflecterend schrijven bij elkaar komen, waardoor een hybridische tekst ontstaat als wetenschappelijk genre in onderzoek. Door studenten te stimuleren creatief en kritisch werk te combineren in literatuurwetenschappelijke cursussen en schrijf cursussen, worden zij in de gelegenheid gesteld een brug te slaan tussen manieren van reageren op teksten die van oudsher als twee onderscheiden vormen onderwezen en beoordeeld werden. In dit artikel wordt het voorbeeld behandeld van een scriptie door een student als een katalysator voor het bespreken van de aard van ‘fictocritical’ schrijven. Fictocritical werk als een wetenschappelijk genre biedt verschillende mogelijkheden om theoretische en creatieve benaderingen van het reageren op en het produceren van teksten te combineren; het slaat een brug tussen het creatieve en theoretische in onderzoek, zowel binnen de discipline van creatief schrijven als in de literatuurwetenschap.

TREFWOORDEN: creatief schrijven, literatuurwetenschap, ‘fictocritical’ schrijven

Finnish

[Translation Katri Sarmavuori]

TITTELI. RETORISET MALLIT PELISSÄ: HARJOITUS KIRJALLISEN JA LUOVAN KIRJOITTAMISEN TUTKIMUKSEN KÄYTÄNNÖSTÄ TUTKITTUNA

ABSTRAKTI. Tämä esitys selvittää fiktiivis-kriittisen kirjoittamisen kompleksisuutta muotona, joka yhdistää luovaa kirjoittamista, kirjallista ja kulttuurista teoriaa ja itsereflektiivistä kirjoittamista. Tutkimuksessa luotiin hybridi teksti genrenä. Kun opiskelijoita rohkaistiin yhdistämään luovaa ja kriittistä työtä kirjallisuuden opinnoissa tai kirjoittamiskurssilla, heidän sallittiin rakentaa silta tavoille vastata teksteihin, jotka on traditionaalisesti opetettu ja arvioitu kahtena erillisenä muotona. Esitys käyttää esimerkkinä opiskelijan opinnäytetyötä keskusteluun fiktiivis-kriittisen kirjoituksen luonteesta. Fiktiivis-kriittinen työ opinnäytegenrenä tarjoaa erilaisia mahdollisuuksia yhdistää teoreettisia ja luovia lähestymistapoja vastata teksteihin ja tuottaa niitä; se tarjoaa sillan luovan ja teoreettisen tutkimuksen välille sekä luovan kirjoittamisen ja kirjallisuuden tutkimuksen välille.

AVAINSANAT: Luova kirjoittaminen, kirjallisuuden opinnot, fiktiivis-kriittinen kirjoittaminen

French

[Translation Laurence Pasa]

TITRE. LES MODELES RHÉTORIQUES : EXPLORATION D'UN EXERCICE D'ÉCRITURE LITTÉRAIRE ET CRÉATIVE

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article examine la complexité de l'écriture fictocritique comme une forme qui mêle la création littéraire, les théories littéraires et culturelles et l'écriture autoréflexive pour créer un texte hybride, tel un genre scolaire en développement. Amener les étudiants à travailler de façon créative et critique les analyses littéraires ou les cours sur l'écriture, leur permet de construire des liens entre les différentes façons d'aborder des textes qui, traditionnellement, sont enseignés et considérés comme des formes distinctes. L'article prend l'exemple d'un mémoire d'étudiant de licence comme un catalyseur pour aborder les propriétés de l'écriture fictocritique. L'écrit fictocritique, en tant que genre scolaire, offre diverses

possibilités pour combiner des approches théoriques et créatives de la réception et de la production de textes ; il permet de faire le lien entre une dimension créative et une dimension théorique, à la fois du point de vue de la recherche, de la création littéraire et des études littéraires.
MOTS-CLÉS : création littéraire, études littéraires, écriture fictocritique.

German

[Translation Ulrike Bohle, Irene Pieper]

TITEL. Rhetorische Modi im Spiel. Erkundung einer Aufgabe in literaturwissenschaftlicher Forschung und Forschung zum kreativen Schreiben

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG. Dieser Artikel untersucht die Komplexität fikto-kritischen Schreibens als eine Form, die kreatives Schreiben, Literatur- und Kulturtheorie und selbstreflexives Schreiben verbindet und einen hybriden Text als wissenschaftliches Genre in der Forschung entstehen lässt. Studenten dazu zu ermuntern, in literaturwissenschaftlichen Kursen oder Schreibkursen kritische und kreative Textarbeit zu verbinden, erlaubt ihnen einen Brückenschlag zwischen zwei traditionellen Zugangsweisen zu Texten. Am Beispiel einer studentischen Abschlussarbeit (Honours) werden Charakteristika des fikto-kritischen Schreibens diskutiert. Fikto-kritische Arbeit als wissenschaftliches Genre eröffnet vielfältige Möglichkeiten, theoretische und kreative Ansätze der Textrezeption und Textproduktion zu verbinden, es schlägt eine Brücke zwischen dem Kreativen und dem Theoretischen der Wissenschaft, in der Literaturwissenschaft wie auch im kreativen Schreiben.

SCHLAGWORTER: Kreatives Schreiben, Literaturwissenschaft, fikto-kritisches Schreiben

Greek

[Translation by Panatoya Papoulia Tzelepi]

Τίτλος. Ρητορικοί τρόποι σε δράση: Άσκηση στην πράξη έρευνας στο γραμματισμό και στο δημιουργικό γράψιμο

Περίληψη. Αυτό το άρθρο εξετάζει την πολυπλοκότητα του γράψιματος φαντασίας και κριτικής ως μορφή που ενώνει τη δημιουργική γραφή, το γραμματισμό, τη θεωρία της κουλτούρας και το αυτό αναστοχαστικό γράψιμο για να δημιουργηθεί ένα υβριδικό κείμενο ως επιστημονικό είδος έρευνας. Η ενθάρρυνση των σπουδαστών να συνδυάσουν δημιουργική και κριτική εργασία στις λογοτεχνικές σπουδές και στα μαθήματα γραφής, τους επιτρέπει να χτίσουν γέφυρα μεταξύ της απάντησης στα κείμενα τα οποία κατά παράδοση διδάσκονται και αξιολογούνται ως δύο ξεχωριστές μορφές. Το άρθρο χρησιμοποιεί το παράδειγμα μιας πτυχιακής εργασίας ως καταλύτη για τη συζήτηση της φύσης της αναστοχαστικοκριτικής γραφής. Αυτή η γραφή ως λόγιο είδος προσφέρει διαφορετικές δυνατότητες συνδυασμού θεωρητικών και δημιουργικών προσεγγίσεων στην επεξεργασία και παραγωγή κειμένων. Προσφέρει μια γέφυρα μεταξύ της δημιουργικότητας και της θεωρητικής έρευνας είτε στη δημιουργική γραφή, είτε στις λογοτεχνικές σπουδές.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: Δημιουργική γραφή, λογοτεχνικές σπουδές, φανταστικοκριτική γραφή

Italian

[Translation Manuela Delfino, Francesco Caviglia]

TITOLO. Modi retorici in gioco: un esercizio di esplorazione di pratiche di ricerca di scrittura letteraria e creativa

SINTESI. Questo articolo esamina la complessità della scrittura critica di finzione (*fictocritical*) come una forma che riunisce scrittura creativa, teoria della letteratura e della cultura e scrittura riflessiva per creare un testo ibrido che diventa un genere a sè stante nella ricerca accademica da considerare appartenente a un genere accademico di ricerca. Nel momento in cui incoraggia gli studenti a combinare una dimensione creativa e una critica negli studi letterari e nei corsi di scrittura creativa, tale genere permette di creare un ponte tra modalità di risposta a testi che sono tradizionalmente insegnate e valutate in due forme distinte. Questo articolo prende spunto dalla tesi conclusiva del primo triennio di un corso di laurea, scritta da uno studente, come catalizzatore per discutere la natura della scrittura critica di finzione. La scrittura critica di finzione come genere accademico offre varie possibilità per combinare approcci teorici e creativi alla risposta a testi e alla produzione di testi; offre un ponte tra l'elemento creativo e l'elemento teorico nella ricerca, sia nella disciplina della scrittura creativa, sia nella disciplina degli studi letterari.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Scrittura creativa, Studi letterari, Scrittura critica di finzione.

Polish

[Translation Elżbieta Awramiuk]

TITUL. Retoryczne style w akcji: badania nad wykorzystaniem ćwiczeń w literackim i twórczym pisaniu
STRESZCZENIE: Niniejszy artykuł poświęcony jest złożoności krytycznoliterackiego tekstu jako formy, która łączy pisanie twórcze, teorię literatury i kultury oraz autorefleksję podczas stworzenia hybrydalnego tekstu – akademickiego gatunku poddanego badaniom. Zachęcanie studentów, by łączyli pisanie twórcze z pracą krytyczną podczas studiów literaturoznawczych lub na kursach pisania pozwala im zbudować most między sposobami reakcji na teksty, które tradycyjnie są nauczane i oceniane jako dwie odrębne formy. W artykule wykorzystano wyróżniające się prace dyplomowe studentów, które potraktowano jako katalizator dyskusji na temat natury pisania krytycznoliterackiego. Praca krytycznoliteracka jako gatunek akademicki oferuje różne możliwości łączenia teoretycznego i twórczego podejścia do odbioru i tworzenia tekstu, buduje pomost między badaniem twórczym i teoretycznym, zarówno w zakresie pisania twórczego, jak i studiów literaturoznawczych.

SLOWA-KLUCZE: pisanie twórcze, studia literaturoznawcze, pisanie krytycznoliterackie

Portuguese

[Translation Sara Leite]

TÍTULO. MODOS RETÓRICOS EM JOGO: EXPLORANDO UM EXECÍCIO DE INVESTIGAÇÃO EM ESCRITA CRIATIVA E CRÍTICA

RESUMO. Neste artigo examina-se a complexidade da escrita fictocrítica enquanto meio que permite combinar a escrita criativa, os estudos literários e culturais e a escrita auto-reflexiva, de modo a criar um texto híbrido que funciona como género académico na investigação. Incentivar os alunos a combinar os trabalhos criativo e crítico, no âmbito dos estudos literários ou em cursos de escrita, permite-lhes construir uma ponte entre duas formas de reagir aos textos que são tradicionalmente ensinadas e avaliadas enquanto produções distintas. No artigo, toma-se a tese de licenciatura de um aluno como ponto de partida para discutir a natureza da escrita fictocrítica. A escrita fictocrítica enquanto género académico oferece diversas possibilidades de articulação entre as abordagens teórica e criativa no âmbito da produção escrita sobre textos, proporcionando uma ligação entre o teórico e o criativo na investigação, tanto na disciplina de escrita criativa como na de estudos literários.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Escrita Criativa, Estudos Literários, Escrita Fictocrítica.

Spanish

[Translation Ingrid Marquez]

TÍTULO. Maneras retóricas de jugar : Una exploración de la investigación sobre la redacción y la creación literaria

RESUMEN. Este ensayo examina la complejidad de la escritura ficto-crítica como forma unificadora de la creación literaria, la teoría literaria y cultural y la escritura auto-reflexiva para crear un texto híbrido como género de investigación intelectual. El fomentar que los estudiantes combinen el trabajo creativo y crítico, tanto en los estudios literarios como en cursos de redacción, les permite crear un puente entre la manera tradicional de crear un texto y de responder ante ello, habilidades que se suelen evaluar de forma diferente. Este ensayo usa como ejemplo el tema de una tesis honorífica de nivel licenciatura como catalizadora para hablar de la naturaleza de la escritura ficto-crítica. Como género intelectual, el trabajo ficto-crítico ofrece varias posibilidades en cuanto a la combinación de enfoques teóricos y creativos al producir y analizar textos; ofrece un puente entre lo creativo y teórico en la investigación, tanto dentro de la disciplina de la creación literaria como en estudios literarios.

PALABRAS CLAVE: creación literaria, estudios literarios, escritura ficto-crítica.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I explore issues of teaching and assessing experimental writing in literature and writing classes. Such writing challenges the traditional critical or research essay. It demands a different set of skills from students and a different mindset for the teacher who guides the student and must assess a paper that often defies convention. In literary studies, the standard or usual mode of assessment is via written examination or essay involving interpretation and critical analysis of texts. In creative writing, the mode of assessment is via the production of a creative artefact,

perhaps a short story, poem, creative nonfiction essay, or a chapter of a novel. At honours (final year undergraduate) or doctoral level, the creative artefact is usually accompanied by an exegesis; that is a theoretical essay positioning the artefact as a text, by form and genre. Further, the exegesis can involve a ‘considered reflection ... on the social, historical and cultural circumstances of the writing process, and of the place and role of the writer within those contexts’ (Skrebels, 2007).

In Australian university programs, the exegesis has been the focus of much academic discussion as scholars argue a case for the creative product—novel, memoir, biography, a poetry collection—to be acknowledged as research.¹ The exegesis can take the form of a straightforward commentary incorporating the above-mentioned elements. It can also be developed as a text which merges creative and critical forms and elements, or plays across different genres and modes, often evolving as a ‘mutated’ or hybrid text, becoming something more than the sum of its parts. ‘Fictocritical’ work is acknowledged as a means of combining theory, research, and critical and creative elements, thus allowing scholars and students to bridge the divide between literary critical and creative writing and allowing them to take advantage of the theoretical frames offered variously from cultural studies, communication theory, anthropology and so on.² Gibbs offered this early definition:

In Australia such writing, which uses fictional and poetic strategies to stage theoretical questions and which reads theoretical texts in any discipline in light of their rhetorical strategies and figures, has come to be called ‘fictocriticism’. (Gibbs, 2003).

Dawson (2005) explains further:

Writing identified as fictocritical tends to shift between fragmentary modes of experimentation, from essayistic to poetic to theoretical, employing autobiographical elements and story-telling techniques, and is often supported by the scholarly apparatus of quotation, referencing and footnoting. (Dawson, 2005, 167)

More than this, suggest Kerr and Nettelbeck, it ‘mutates’ the creative and the critical ‘bringing a spotlight to bear upon the known forms in order to make them “say” something else’ (1998, pp. 3-4).

To explore this I focus here on one student’s final year BA project (a 20 000-word Honours thesis) to reveal something of the way fictocritical work can be encouraged

¹ Australian scholars engaged in a lively debate in print about the role of the creative artefact and exegesis in a special edition of the journal *TEXT*, *Text Special Issue Website Series*, Number 3 April 2004 - *Illuminating the Exegesis* - <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue3/content.htm> [accessed 8/9/080]

² In a recent provocative essay, Mike Harris addresses the issue of the place of literary theory in creative writing courses, and particularly in the work undertaken by creative writing Ph.D. students and researchers. It is germane to the discussion of fictocritical work, because he challenges the co-opting of literary and cultural theory by creative writers and suggests that a new approach is needed to the way writers talk about and theorise creative writing. Citing Nelson (2008) who suggests a move to a ‘productive post-critical research vocabulary’ which enables analysis of ‘the experience of the writer writing’, he suggests that we need to ‘make a radical conceptual break’ from literary theory which he sees as inappropriate to creative writing. (2009)

within the academy and used in writing or literature courses. Juliet's thesis set out to explore 'women's use of humour' in fictional narrative but with a deliberate focus on the contemporary and popular genre, 'chick lit': a genre exemplified by Helen Fielding's popular novel *Bridget Jones Diary*. The thesis title, *Will you take me seriously humorously: A tentative start to becoming a serious humorous writer and bridging the academic vs personal/ creative divide*, itself highlights the process of interweaving the academic and the creative to build a fictocritical text. The thesis was the output of a student in a writing program, so it was to be a written artefact, which demonstrated creative narrative technique accompanied by evidence of critical reading and the capacity to use and discuss literary and cultural theory appropriate to the topic.³

2. HYBRID/MULTI-GENRE/MULTI-MODAL/FICTOCRITICAL TEXTS – POSSIBILITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Theorists discussing fictocritical texts refer to such texts as hybrid—hybrid because they play across genres, but are deliberately theoretical and scholarly in intent. This perhaps marks them as different from the multi-genre writing, which has found a place in writing programs in composition and writing classes in the US and elsewhere (Romano, 1995, 2000; Shipka, 2005; Simon, 2007). A multi-genre text, according to Romano:

... arises from research, experience, and imagination. It is not an uninterrupted, expository monolog nor a seamless narrative or collection of poems. A multigenre paper is composed of many genres and subgenres, each piece self-contained, making a point of its own, yet connected by theme or topic and sometimes by language, images, and content. In addition to many genres, a multigenre paper may also contain many voices, not just the author's. The trick is to make such a paper hang together. (Romano, 2005, p. xi)

Romano suggests that the successful multi-genre text creates 'a single literary experience'. He illustrates the point with reference to Michael Ondaatje's book, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970), which contains '... songs, thumbnail character sketches, poems, a comic book excerpt, narrative, stream-of-consciousness passages, newspaper interviews, even photographs and drawings' (2000, pp. 3-4).

It is noticeable that this description does not include the many representational modes now available to writers via digital and electronic media—creating the opportunity for multi-modal texts. Thus, what is possible in creating a new text from many genres might now be extended by the advent of digital technologies and the preparedness of writing and literature teachers and students to experiment (see, for example, Shipka, 2005; Swiss & Damon, 2006). The world of digital media has already had an impact on the way teachers and students of writing and of literature approach their work. As Smith notes:

In the digital era ... writing means not only working with words: it is an engagement with a number of different media of which language is one component. Writing in the

³ *The relationship between critical reading and creative writing, particularly as it determines the assessable products has been explored by Dawson (2005, 2006) and Freiman (2005)*

digital age offers the opportunity to bring words, music, and image together into the same space, the computer. (2006, p. 178).

It also means that there is a need for a new or renewed theorising of writing: writing which Smith defines as ‘posthuman’:

This posthuman writing arises out of a push and pull between silicon hardware and flesh and blood writer: between the mechanistic and the bodily; the systematic and the emergent; the multimedia environments and words on the page. (Smith, 2006, p. 169)

Richard Lanham also calls for a new conceptualisation of writing and of teaching about books and writing, given the potential that digital expression offers. The ‘new spaces for words’, he says, ‘... will require a new conception of rhetoric, a new doctrine for teaching expression in an electronic attention economy’ (Lanham, 2006, p. 145). This economy is one that is predicated on the capacity for the electronic and digital media to ‘allocate human attention’ (130) such that the production of any text is a rhetorical exercise in persuasion, a grab for attention in a crowded landscape. In such a landscape and in the face of the impact and potential engendered by the ever-evolving representational technologies, we teach literature and writing. It is in this context that our students read literary texts and write about them or write creatively and then seek to position their work theoretically and conceptually in relation to the work of other writers. If they take advantage of the opportunity to meld genres and forms and to use digital media to work ‘in the new spaces for words’ they move toward new hybridity in text design and production.

The fictocritical text, the multi-genre text, the multi-modal text are not necessarily synonymous, although each might involve the production of a hybrid text. There are, however, two sides to the coin involved in the exercise of producing what is essentially a fictocritical text. On one side, such work reflects the complex play of rhetorical and representational modes employed. And on the other, the challenge is to include the theoretical along with the speculative and reflective and to insist on collapsing the personal, the creative and the critical, including the activities of synthesis and analysis, and the interweaving of narrative and theory.

The fictocritical essay or exegesis combines elements of creative production (perhaps multi-genre and/or multi-modal text) with material and concepts drawn from literary criticism and cultural theory to say something about a topic or the creative artefact. Experimental or hybrid writing which results is of particular interest as literature and writing (creative, professional and composition) programs strive to meet the needs and expectations of technologically savvy students for whom a range of media and genres available for expressing ideas is second nature. Thus what is of interest to me is how students might use the possibilities for producing texts, which interweave theoretical commentary and imaginative elements to produce an essay or thesis that demonstrates their capacity to use literary and cultural theory. In so doing they create a work which bridges the divide between creative work and critical analysis and interpretation. There are challenges for teachers who supervise and assess such work.

3. TOWARD THE FICTOCRITICAL TEXT – JULIET BEGINS

To see how Juliet established her project we need to turn to the classroom, where in an Honours seminar ten students are discussing progress on their Honours theses. These are students who have majored in writing and creative communication in their BA degree and, now in their 4th year, are researching and writing a 20 000 word thesis. As noted above, Juliet had decided to work on ‘chick lit’ and in particular, the comedic turn in such popular fiction. On this day, she talked of ‘being stuck’ in finding a way forward or even a ‘way in’ to the thesis. She pointed out that analytic and expository writing was her forte but that she was struggling to find a way to explore and deal with her topic. In recollecting this dilemma and the suggestion made to help her approach ‘chick lit’ as a genre, she wrote:

You can imagine the consternation I felt when (the teacher), upon hearing my then current plan for analysing ‘chick lit’ requested from me a chapter of my own ‘chick lit’ novel. Not only to be read out in class, but with a view that this could actually form part of my thesis. ‘Say what?’ was my initial reaction. Nausea was my second. Somewhere deep within was the idea that this might just be fun after all, even though my only first hand experience with ‘chick lit’ was one reading of *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (Fielding 1997) and many viewings of the film based on the book (I am a ‘singleton’ after all. This was my story.) How could I go from reading male writers such as Ian McEwan, Colm Toibin, and Tim Winton, to writing what my snobbish sensibility considered mindless, silly, girly fun? (Giles, 2004)

Write it she did: a chapter for a ‘chick lit’ novel. Read it to the class she did: where the reading was accompanied by roars of laughter and applause from her classmates.

In suggesting that she write creatively, the aim was to reinforce what she had already experienced in her undergraduate writing program. She had studied for three years in an undergraduate writing and communication program in which she had been introduced to ways of reading texts by first intervening with them in creative ways (playing with them to rewrite or re-genre them). This is what Pope terms ‘textual intervention’ (Pope, 1994).

Textual intervention is a way of critiquing a text, be it the creative nonfiction essay, a short story, or a poem, such that the reader or writer experiences it directly by first altering it, playing with it by changing a word, reworking it in a different genre, rewriting it from the perspective of a marginalised character, producing a parody, remaking it as a film script or video performance. As the writer reads the text to remake it, she explores it while drawing on literary and cultural theory to understand what happens as the original text is altered and remade. This process puts the literature student as reader into a relationship with the text as a writer, or the writing student into a particular relationship with the text as reader. Such a process had already shown Juliet how to approach texts critically while also encouraging her to reflect on her own writing and rhetorical strategies. She now became a writer of fiction—as a means to approach the theoretical and critical work of exploring the contemporary and popular genre of ‘chick lit’.

In researching and writing her Honours thesis, Juliet aimed to demonstrate how her understanding of theory and her skills as a writer, reader and producer of texts, had come together. Her aims for the thesis included, ‘acquiring and developing the

skills to write ... across a broad range of fields' and 'understanding myself as a writer of both academic and of personal/creative writing'. In the thesis, she combined chapters for a creative fiction (an exercise in 'chick lit') interwoven with discussion of theoretical issues and critical comment (she titles this the 'narrated theory' section). She included poetry and a final self-reflective, even confessional, essay on the process of understanding and reading 'chick lit' and attempting to write such work. Juliet set out to demonstrate that the rhetorical challenges for the student who researches and produces an Honours thesis are a 'meta problem'. She did write in several genres, although she did not exercise the possibilities of multi-modal technologies. Yet she was particularly conscious of the crafting and design aspects of her thesis. For the writing student, even more overtly than for most other students, this is the problem in producing a thesis:

The very object of the thesis is the writing itself as much as is the content of the thesis. The Honours student is presenting him or herself as author, creator of a text. Complexities of treading the fine line between researcher and writer are writ large for the writing student, particularly when the student decides to 'work' the genre of the thesis so that the writing presented cuts across genre boundaries. (Woods, 2000)

As Juliet began to think differently of herself as the researcher and writer, because she was deliberately producing a creative text and a theoretical (literary and cultural theory) text designed as a coherent whole, and seeing the relationship between form and content as an iterative interplay, she writes:

This was useful for many reasons; firstly it allowed me to focus on the writing as much as the content (the medium, not the message) and secondly, it opened up the idea of challenge and the intrigue of working within these 'complexities' and 'to work the genre'. Thus for me now, the content could become the plaything of the writing process not that which dictated the writing style. (Giles, 2004)

The notion of 'working the genre' or treating content as the 'plaything of the writing process' is a useful way to reconceptualise what is happening when students write in a multi-genre mode (Romano, 2000). Juliet's thesis, however, goes further than simply melding different genres, such as poetry and fictive prose. It is firmly in the 'fictocritical' mode. Juliet's work is a fully integrated paper in which the expository, the creative and the theoretical are allowed to play across each other, thus constructing a dialectic of forms and ways of thinking and responding. This dialectic can then have something new to say. Juliet begins:

If you are seeking an expository, argument driven, impersonal thesis then I'm afraid you've come to the wrong place; for this is an exploratory, partly fictional, organically grown, subjectively written thesis about my tentative steps to becoming a serious humorous writer, and particularly, the act of bridging the academic versus the personal/creative divide in thesis writing. (Giles, 2005, p. 1)

In linked parts, following a scene setting and definitional introduction, the thesis offers a fictionalised diary ('chick lit' style) of several days in the life of Zoë—a doctoral student and part-time tutor—and a narrative encounter of a family gathering, in which ensues a discussion of theoretical issues as one might imagine in a dinner table conversation. The diary sets in train the emerging theoretical points, which are taken up more firmly in the family scenario. A self-reflexive conclusion

mixing theoretical discussion and including a lengthy poem completes the thesis. Throughout the thesis, Juliet employs all the apparatus of scholarly writing – footnotes, citation and referencing. She summarises the project thus:

The narrated theory section is where the theory relating to women's use of humour is communicated via fictional narrative means, in this instance, a family dinner table conversation. The introduction and conclusion are written in fictocritical and scholarly personal narrative styles, incorporating theory relating to plain language, fictocriticism, scholarly personal narrative writing, the carnivalesque, and *écriture féminine*, especially as these can become tools in creating new spaces in academic writing. These methods and styles were chosen as a way to demonstrate skills in communicating complex ideas clearly, accurately and with integrity to both an academic and non-academic readership, and to do so in a way that is entertaining and humorous. (Giles, 2005, p. iii)

The complex interplay of theoretical and creative components marks this work as different from blended or multi-genre writing, as described by Romano, whereby blurred genre work within writing courses (Romano, 2000; Taylor, 2005) provides an opportunity for constructing bridges between literary study, creative writing and expository writing. Romano's work posits the 'style, versatility and possibilities' of the multi-genre paper with an emphasis on narrative, particularly on the personal/emotional as well as the cognitive (2000, p. xi). (He does, however, make clear that the skills of mastering academic discourse and of research, and of reading carefully and critically are not to be abandoned.) He argues that the focus on narrative and experimentation with many genres, that is, 'knowing the world through story, poem and song, through imagery, metaphor, and symbol' has the potential to expand a student's 'cognitive repertoire and rhetorical skills' (2000, p. 56). The emphasis in the multi-genre work for Romano is on narrative, although he pointedly answers critics who worry that students will not be able to sustain a coherent argument or discussion: 'There is, of course nothing to rule out students including in their papers of multiple genres incisive, expository discussion or revelatory analysis' (2000, p. 87). His students, he comments 'have rarely done this' (p.87) Thus for Romano, the integration of the many available ways of representing the world in scholarly contexts is not actively pursued.

Yet it is such integration I contend, that allows for a dialogue between the expository and critical analysis as well as the opportunity for personal commentary and the narrative/ poetic. This may not suit or be appropriate for all students in composition or expository writing courses. However, it is likely to suit students in literature programs and creative writing programs. As Taylor has noted (of the US context), 'More writing classes are moving beyond passive interpretation of subjects [that is, the essays and nonfiction prose as the subject of writing courses and a genre treated without respect by English or Creative Writing] to practice of narrative forms and artistry which lead students to practical uses of writing in a variety of occupations and art forms' (Taylor, 2005, p. 120).

Taylor illustrates this with a description of the approach taken in the expository writing program at Brown University, where there is an orientation towards creative nonfiction, journalism and persuasive writing. She describes it thus:

The common pedagogy of these courses ... is to train students to craft engaging, intelligent stories of life and intellectual journey which analyze, instruct, and persuade a general as well as a scholarly audience.

They can write an honors thesis of collected academic essays or feature articles, a collection of prose poems or memoirs, a biography or a critical analysis of the evolving field of creative nonfiction. (Taylor, 2005, p. 121)

She quotes Robert Root to assert,

If this is the kind of writing that's out there, that people write now, why aren't we encouraging our students not simply to read it but to write it – to be apprentice nonfictionists, preparing to join the conversation?' (Root, 2003, in Taylor, 2005, p. 130)

This suggests construction of a meeting point between creative writing and expository writing, and between studying and responding to literary texts and creative writing. Further, it admits the possibility of presenting the personal alongside the academic and the theoretical within the already accepted forms and modes of academic discourse, particularly the disciplines of literature and writing. In the work described by Romano and Taylor, such integration is hinted at but is not developed further. Fictocritical writing aims specifically at such interweaving.

4. FICTOCRITICAL WRITING AS A MODE OF WRITING AND RESEARCH

In the context of the new and dynamic world of digital expression, as well as the world of intersections between the disciplines of literature, creative writing, and cultural studies, it would seem useful to take the notion of the multi-genre paper further and to discuss the kind of writing that allows for students to use theoretical analysis and interpretation to work actively alongside creative work: thus the value of the fictocritical approach.

The term 'fictocritical' has been around for some time. Frederic Jameson used the term 'ficto-criticism' in 1987 as a way of linking theory and criticism as 'an advanced and energetic form of conceptual criticism' (in Dawson, 2002, p. 140). Kerr and Nettelbeck suggest:

Fictocriticism might most usefully be defined as hybridised writing that moves between the poles of fiction ('invention'/'speculation') and criticism ('deduction'/'explication'), of subjectivity ('interiority') and objectivity('exteriority'). It is writing that brings the 'creative' and the 'critical' together – not simply in the sense of placing them side by side but in the sense of mutating both, of bringing the spotlight to bear on the known forms in order to make them 'say' something else. (1998, pp. 3-4)

Fictocriticism, as a particular hybrid form of writing has been particularly instrumental as a mode of writing which has provided the substance of much research activity in Creative Writing programs in Australia. Or as Dawson has noted, it has enabled the focus for 'theoretical and institutional negotiations between the creative and the critical', whereby creative writing is liberated from its 'parasitical dependence on literature' (Dawson, 2005, p. 167). Dawson elaborates upon fictocritical work as a 'space between':

The prevailing trope of fictocritical discourse is that of a 'space between' the categories of fiction and criticism created by the epistemological collapse of critical distance in

postmodern theory: a textual non-man's land in which a generic intermingling and hybridity of form takes place.' (Dawson, 2005, p. 167)

There are elements in fictocriticism to be detected in what in the US is termed 'craft criticism' or 'confessional criticism'. The former is a term offered by Mayers in *(Re)Writing Craft: Composition, Creative Writing and the Future of English Studies* (2005), in order to highlight and explore the relationship between creative writing, literature and composition and thus to reconceptualise the activities of English studies:

Craft criticism, then refers to critical prose written by self- or institutionally identified 'creative writers'; in craft criticism, a concern with textual production takes precedence over any concern with textual interpretation. (2005, p. 34)

Mayers notes that there is a pedagogical element as well as an evaluative element involved in such activity. However, more importantly he writes, '... it falls under the realm variously referred to as research, scholarship, or publication'. It does this because those who practise craft criticism 'produce critical prose that focuses squarely on issues of contemporary "creative" text production in academic settings' (35).

The term 'confessional criticism', drawing on feminist critique allows for the imprinting of the personal as political in the production of the critical piece—acknowledging the 'I' of the critic (see Dawson, 2005, p. 168). The forces of feminist and critical theory have been influential in the evolution of fictocritical work in Australia (Gibbs, 2005; Ryan, 2005). Gibbs, after noting that fictocritical writing 'is a way of writing for which there is no blueprint and which must constantly be invented anew in the face of the singular problems that arise in the course of engagement with what is researched', writes:

Fictocriticism is free to make use of narrative modes and of the rhetorical strategies available to them, including anecdote and (or as) allegory, which stage the singular encounter between the writer's emergent, embodied subjectivity, and what is written about. This is a way of writing suited to speculative thinking and to modes or research in which the researcher is implicated in what is investigated. (2005)

Creative writing research is conceived by Ryan (2005) as praxis in which textual content analysis and theoretical eclecticism from across a wide range of disciplines is carried out in conjunction with and firmly integrated into creative work. What emerges, she suggests, is a hybrid research model; 'an interactive environment where creative writing and established theory combine to create new ideas'.

Early examples of such work are cultural theorist Stephen Muecke's *No Road (bitumen all the way)* (1997), and critic and biographer, Janet Malcolm's *Reading Chekhov - A Critical Journey* (2001). Muecke's text (which includes cultural theory, anthropology, travelogue, and political comment) is captioned on the cover as 'A seductive mix of storytelling and ideas and a personal account' and as a 'A daring blend of meditation and cultural innovation'. *Reading Chekhov* is described on the cover as '... a literary pilgrimage, homage, travelogue, biography, literary criticism, and a restrained love letter all rolled in one'.

Helen Cixous' *Rootprints* (1997) also fits into the territory as an example of the impact of feminist writers and theoreticians such as Irigaray and Kristeva who re-

shaped the representation of thinking. *Rootprints* demonstrates theoretical and creative hybridity: a mix of Cixous' words, those of her interlocutor and co-author Mireile Calle-Gruber, window inserts which 'give onto' her notebooks, and photographs and images. Cixous begins by creating the alliance of the poetic and the theoretical: 'What is most true is poetic' (1997, p. 3). The integral relationship between Cixous' fiction and theoretical essays, says Calle-Gruber, should be recognised:

... there is misunderstanding about the 'term' theory: the writing you practise is more like a form of philosophical reflection that you lead through poetry. But the misunderstanding comes also from the fact that, in the very course of the work of fiction, you pursue an effort of lucidity ... Certain people misunderstand; consider it to be a theoretical treatment whereas it is a poetic treatment; incessant fictional practice. It's the same linguistic dough, from the same pen, that poetry and philosophical reflexion weave a text. (1997, pp. 4-5)

The weaving demonstrated in texts such as those of Muecke, Malcolm and Cixous is more than a mixing of genres; they are texts in which the different genres are allowed to play against and with each other in order to make something different and which read as a coherent statement. Thus the writer or creator of the text (particularly if the text is one which, as is increasingly the case, incorporates digital or multi-modal forms) is a designer as much as a writer. Pope has clearly focused on this when he describes the work of textual intervention as 'artisanal':

Approaching texts as an "artisan", as a "crafts/wo/man", means that you treat them with respect – but also the non-nonsense directness and systematicness – that a skilled engineer or dressmaker approaches their materials task at hand. (Pope, 1995, p. 3)

5. JULIET AS NOVELIST AND CRITIC

It is this spirit that Juliet set to work. As both creator and receiver, she was well prepared to develop a coherent work which examined 'chick lit' and the comic impulse. In her undergraduate education, she developed skills as a writer and researcher of specific contexts, as a reader and re-maker of literary texts (as a writer committed to the *techne* or art and craft of making of a text), as a writer who can write creatively (playing with texts in order to see how they have been made and what can be newly made of them), and as a reader interpreting and exploring texts from perspectives offered by a range of cultural and literary theories. She considered the rhetorical exigencies of texts and contexts.⁴ To this has been added the excitement of ludic (playful) activity with 'textual intervention' (Pope, 1995) combined with eclectic

⁴ In one of her courses for example, she read Charles Dickens, George Orwell, Joan Didion and also Cintron's *Angel's Town: Chero Ways, Gang Life and Rhetorics of the Everyday; the ethnographic and rhetorical study of Chicago gangs, their world and discourse*. She also read the fictocritical work by Stephen Muecke's *No Road; a self-reflective/critical and creative commentary in cultural studies of an ethnographic journey into the spaces between Indigenous and non-Indigenous culture in Australia*. She paid close attention as a writer reading the texts of others to 'seeing through language' as Carter and Nash term it in their work on rhetoric and language (1990). She read literary theory and works on autoethnography, and discussion of the way in which qualitative research might be re-presented in layered voices (Lather, 1996)) and creative use of footnotes (Cushman, 1996).

use of theory (Pope, 2002, 2004). Pope suggests that what is useful in textual study is an approach where theoretical and interpretive work is seen as:

... a pragmatic activity of gathering and selecting, refining and adapting, whatever tools and techniques work with materials and task in hand ...

For the fact is that virtually all the most powerful and persuasive contemporary approaches turn out to be mixtures, compounds or hybrids and, however principled, in some measure 'impure' – in a word eclectic. (2002, p. 155)

Practitioners and proponents of fictocritical work in creative writing, literary and cultural studies research would surely echo these words. As Skrebels points out such an approach to research in creative writing (and in literary studies) dissolves the 'artificial and ultimately unhelpful – for the writer-researcher – binaries (of) 'academy/'real-world'', theory/practice, critical/creative and even one as fundamental as reading/writing'. These binaries, he suggests, are thus 'transformed instead into the dialectics on which a more dynamic approach to creative writing research might be based' (Skrebels, 2007).

Danuta Raine illustrates this approach in a recent essay, 'Essaying the Self: ethnicity, identity and the fictocritical essay', in which she explores the relationship between the essay (a form of ideas and argument) and, specifically, the genre of life-writing:

Because of the close relationship between identity formation and the process of constructing the familiar essay (Hazlitt 1963a:163) the fictocritical essay became significant in exploring the biographical material surrounding my ethnic heritage. (Raine, 2009)

She makes the point that, 'In fictocriticism, the beauty of life-writing blends with the cultural discourses surrounding the subject *I*'. Thus, 'In this way fictocritical writing allows a familiar voice to emerge for life writers' (Raine, 2005). This aspect of the thesis process was important to Juliet's endeavour:

By creatively and critically engaging with the genre of humorous/comedic writing by women, ... I am able to more thoroughly understand the social construction of this genre, not only as a female reader, but also as a female writer/ producer of texts ... To fuse that which is considered 'high' culture—the academic, the literary, with one aspect of what is commonly deemed 'low' culture—popular female fiction. It is not my intention to pit one against the other in a fight to the death. It is to blend the two, to create a hybrid thesis that will speak not only to those familiar with each genre, but cross-pollinate them so that each might begin to understand and appreciate the other. (Giles, 2005, p. 6)

The dimensions of such research writing were made clear in the assessment report for Juliet's thesis. The external examiner implicitly read the thesis with the following elements in mind and commented on them:

- creative writing
- exploration of theoretical territories and critical analysis
- integration of the creative and the critical/theoretical into a coherent hybrid text
- effective argument sustained throughout the hybrid text
- intellectual risk
- self-reflexive exploration of progress and process

This list brings us immediately back to some of what Romano has encouraged and ties in with directions signalled by Fishman, Lunsford, Macgregor and Otuteye when they call for reconsideration of the rhetoric (or rhetorics) of performance in writing classrooms, allowing for self-reflection, poetry in performance, improvisation, performance texts and so on (2005). Thus, for the composition teacher, the issue would seem to involve giving students the opportunity to engage in what Tucker calls multi-dimensional knowledge-making, including self-reflexive and multi-genre presentations (Tucker, 2000, p. 52). From the creative writing teacher's perspective (particularly in Australia) it is about producing a dialogic exercise mixing the autobiographical, the theoretical and the creative and playing with rhetorical modes to form one coherent piece of fictocritical writing. The process of playing with the text to construct it as a disciplined blend of theoretical exploration and exposition with creative elements and self-reflexive comment causes the students to focus on the 'meta' issues of text production. With the creative and the theoretical writing alongside each other students become involved in a particular kind of learning and knowledge-making, one not constrained by traditional academic forms. The result is the creation of a particular form of hybrid text as a way of responding to other texts and reflecting on the writer's own text.⁵ This allows for the legitimation of creative work as a research.

How can we enable this in the writing or the literature class? How might we respond to hybridity in which elements of design, visual, multi-modal performance and production, integration/interplay of genres, innovation, imagination, rhetorical skill, written language skills/academic discourse are all available to the student? With the resources of new media – the digital spaces now available—we might see not only a rhetoric of the digital (Lanham's 'electronic economy'), but Smith's 'posthuman writing'. If we encourage such hybridity, how do we assess and respond? This is the arts of discourse for a postmodern context. Fishman, Lunsford *et al* note in relation to this:

In the future, we and others need to define a rhetoric (or several rhetorics) of performance, just as we need to develop strong rubrics for evaluating different "writing" performances that our student complete for our classes. Certainly, we need to pay more attention to the fifth canon of rhetoric, delivery. (2005, p. 246)

Referring to the dynamism of performance in writing they comment:

To express this activity – the "now-ness" of performance – we need a flexible critical vocabulary as well as a catalog of writing and rhetorical situations that call for amplified, performative, and embodied argumentation of different kinds. (2005, p. 247)

⁵ *Experimentation with hybrid forms has achieved some acceptance in scholarly professional contexts. For example, in an address to the 2005 Conference on College Composition and Communication, Douglas Hesse demonstrated the sort of knowledge-making that such hybrid text-making allows. In the printed version, published in College Composition and Communication (Hesse, 2005) the reader does not hear or experience the performance including Hesse's singing with which he concluded his address. His was a playful performance but one rich with sound use of theoretical material. The printed version demonstrates the interweaving of the genres as well as the merging of the creative and critical.*

Thus we need to define a rhetoric for new forms of writing and ‘different writing performances’ (broadly defined), and we need to develop ways of assessing these just as we find ways of encouraging and supporting their development.

6. CONCLUSION

In her Honours thesis, Juliet not only discovered something about her chosen topic, ‘chick lit’, including an exploration of texts from Jane Austen to Helen Fielding (author of *Bridget Jones’ Diary*), but of herself as writer and researcher. In setting out the aims for her work, she stated:

I have always seen myself more as a technician than a creative writer, ... but recognize that fictocriticism has the potential to be an ideal transition space; a space where I can shuffle tentatively off the ledge of critical, analytical writing while strengthening my grasp on the trapeze of creativity. I could become, in my thesis, a creative technician ... I could respect the art in academic prose and attempt to acquire that ‘aura’ of the creative. (Giles, 2004, p. 12)

This she did. She produced a thesis of interwoven narratives: stories within the story/theory within the story, and a hybrid multi-genre text of poetry, dramatic dialogue and diary form (an imitation if not parody of the current popular ‘chick lit’ diary). She incorporated exposition, critical and theoretical comment, as well as self-reflexive commentary, supported by the scholarly apparatus of footnotes and citation. The whole created a rhetorical artefact, which served its purpose as an exploration of comedic writing by women.

Fictocritical work of this kind extends the possibilities of the research text. It goes beyond the notion of ‘craft criticism’; it goes beyond the multi-genre paper. It permits the reformulation of such writing, by integrating the personal, the theoretical, the creative, and the analytical. So too might the pedagogical focus on performative response, including the ‘posthuman’ writing possible through the capabilities inherent in new media and digital technologies, in both writing and literature classrooms. Juliet did not work her text in new media but current students are already stretching the ‘performance’ boundaries as they respond as creative writers and students of literature.

Work such as Juliet’s provides us with an opportunity to consider how such work can be encouraged and assessed. The intention of this paper is to open this area for discussion. In literary studies and writing classes, we aim to encourage a lifelong skill in using imagination as well as critical thinking. The bridge in literature courses can be to enable interpretation via creative response to texts, beginning perhaps with the activities generated by textual intervention. In creative writing courses, the bridge is to use all manner of tools and modes to represent the relationship between the activity of creative production and the understanding of the text to be received. Thus, production and reception are examined through process of interweaving the creative and the critical, the personal, the academic, and utilising the potential of genres and media to create something new.

Tellingly, Juliet began her thesis with a quotation from Gesa Kirsch. It seems an appropriate way to conclude this paper:

Certain forms of discourse and language are privileged in the academy: the expository essay is valued over the exploratory; the argumentative essay set above the autobiographical; the clear evocation of a thesis preferred to a

more organic exploration of a topic; the impersonal rational voice ranked more highly than the intimate subjective one ... we need to unravel the system that perpetuates these genre dichotomies in order to teach and write the full range of possible genres. (Kirsch, 1993, p. 130)

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