



# **Writing in Practice volume 10 Editorial**

Kate North and Francis Gilbert

Writing in Practice  
volume 10, 2024

CrossRef DOI: [10.62959/WIP-10-2024-01](https://doi.org/10.62959/WIP-10-2024-01)

## Writing in Practice Volume 10

We are pleased to share that from this issue of *Writing in Practice* all of our articles will be DOI referenced and catalogued. We would like to thank the NAWE Management committee for supporting us with this vital development which will make our articles easier to share, locate and reference. We are also gradually working through our previous issues and articles to retrospectively give them DOI references also. This involves quite a lot of painstaking, detailed work that our Publications Manager William Gallagher, is generously taking on. We are very grateful for his work on this also.

In this issue we have been interested to receive a range of articles that engage with the use of creative writing for mental health and wellbeing purposes.

Kate North

Hywel Dix's *Telling (My) Stories* illustrates the importance of giving people the space and time to tell and pen their own life stories. Dix's research makes a significant contribution to the growing body of work which shows how helpful writing autofiction – fiction which has an autobiographical element – can be for diverse people, who are not necessarily professional writers. His research is notable in pointing out how if set up purposefully and ethically, supporting people to write autofiction can improve their wellbeing in modest ways. This finding is endorsed by decades of research which shows expressive writing of this type can help wellbeing (Pennebaker 2018). Possibly more originally, Dix also shows that the institutional setting of the university for such writing workshops for “ordinary” people – i.e. not current students/academics – can provide a safe and inspiring space.

Nathan Filer expands even more significantly upon the links between writing and mental illness. Drawing upon his own experience as a mental health nurse and his reading of such books like *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Bell Jar*, he explores the creative decisions that writers make when creating fictions which investigate mental

health. His bestselling novel, *The Shock of the Fall*, is discussed in depth, with Filer offering insights into his own creative process which many writers will find invaluable. Above all, Filer offers no easy answers; writing about mental ill health is incredibly complex, but he shows that fiction can provide a way of both representing and illustrating that complexity in a way that many other forms of representation just cannot.

Amie Corry takes this exploration of representation a step further in her exploration of dis/embodiment in Ta-Nahisi Coates's *Between the World and Me*. It is fascinating to perceive how Corry effectively avoids the discourse of mental health, but threaded through her analysis of Coates's groundbreaking book about his brutalising youth in Baltimore, USA, his friend's murder at the hands of the police, and Coates's subsequent sojourn in Paris, is the sense that black people like Coates are necessarily alienated by a racist system. As Corrie eloquently expresses it Coates's work 'powerfully expresses a complex facet of racialised alienation – a desire to separate from, or transcend, one's body, while recognising that awareness of it is what guarantees survival'.

Like Nathan Filer, Gavin James Bower explores the nitty gritty of the medical and health professions and his grief after the death of his father. Having a background working in TV, he wrote a script about an NHS forensic psychiatrist working at a high security hospital. After writing this, he then wrote a memoir about his father's death and his becoming a father for the first time. As he says himself: "I struggled spectacularly to cope with my new responsibilities. This resulted in my arrest for drink-driving at the end of 2015 and then led, beyond all that, to the writing of *Your Father's Secrets*... If the script was about making sense of my grief through fiction then the 'memoir' was designed to make sense of the making sense." Bower, like many of the authors in Issue 10 of *Writing in Practice*, puts it both simply and eloquently when he says his memoir was "designed to make sense of the making sense".

This form of reflection -- metacognitive questing if you like – is very much in evidence in Rupert Loydell's interview with H.L. Hix. Together these two poets make sense of their making sense. As Hix says, "There is already plenty of information out there, and plenty of words. Nobody needs another poem to add to that abundance; but we can use another poem to select from and re-order it." This, then, seems to be the project for many of the writer-researchers in this volume: to use writing as a form of "selection" and "reordering" of experience, particularly challenging experiences.

Moving from selecting and ordering, Patrick Wright questions how poets look within the context of ekphrasis. He considers new ways of viewing that do not give primacy to the work of art as a narrative or imagistic whole. He invites us to consider sections, peripheries and small details to elicit responses.

Sophie Georghiou suggests how a change in perspective can be a political act using the poetry of Chelsea Minnis and Sarah Peters to demonstrate how representations of pleasure can be wrought under the female gaze – as opposed to the traditional male gaze. She suggests that the work of Minnis and Peters offer the reader representations of pleasure that exists across dichotomies such as pleasure and pain or giving and receiving. This is explored with reflections on her own work.

Another article rooted in the contemplation of female lived experience is Mel Parks's *Creative Pause*. Reflecting on a project that explored menopausal wellbeing, a woefully under researched area. As with other articles in this issue, Parks finds that writing workshops, and broader arts practice, can be used to increase understanding,

in this case of the menopause, while also improving wellbeing. It's focus on autoethnography as a method is particularly interesting and I found the suggestion that conversations and dialogues be treated as valuable methods of research refreshing and honest.

Zosia Crosse's article on the value of writing as a method of processing trauma is powerful. Crosse offers a queer feminist take on understanding what trauma is. She explores how graphic fiction writer Alison Bechdel and comedian Hannah Gatsby have used the retelling of their own traumas as the basis for their creative work. She also reflects on her experience of working in the women's sector and the trauma that comes with doing so. Both the trauma of the women seeking help and support along with the personal experience of trauma working in that arena. She articulates how writing and reading feminist fiction helped her process, understand and interrogate her trauma, eventually leading her to write a novel, *We are Volcanoes*.

Finally, we very much hope that you enjoy our guest article for Issue 10. Professor Scott Thurston of Salford University is kind enough to give us the transcript from his inaugural professorial lecture. The lecture was a structured, improvised physical and poetic performance in which he danced, reflected on his journey as a poet over the course of his life and shared how dance and therapy were brought into his practice. It looks a little different on the page to our usual format because of this. We have tried to capture the spirit of the performance and you will be able to judge whether we have managed this. The link to the recording of the performance is given in the introduction.

Francis Gilbert

## References

Pennebaker, J.W. (2018) 'Expressive Writing in Psychological Science', *Perspectives on psychological science*, 13(2), pp. 226–229. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691617707315>.