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Opportunity and Uncertainty: Supervisors, examiners and graduates describe the Critical/Creative Nexus in practice in the Creative Writing PhD at the International Institute of Modern Letters (University of Victoria, Wellington, New Zealand)¹

Key words: Critical/creative nexus, Creative Writing PhD, reflective practice, community of practice, craft-focused research, research question, critical component, writerly idea of critical work, learner agency

Abstract

In December 2014 I held six exploratory interviews with participants in the PhD programme at the International Institute of Modern Letters (IIML), Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand to explore the relationships between the critical and creative components of the PhD as understood by these particular individuals. The interviews show a range of opinions regarding the purpose of the critical component, its form, the assessment of the critical and creative components and the degree structure.

The excerpts below provide a sense of this:

SupEx: ‘My personal perspective is that the critical component shouldn’t be a requirement.’

Sup: ‘I think there’s a kind of figuring out process of “where is that line going to be drawn in my particular version of a PhD between academic criticism as we might understand it and the particular kind of critical thinking that goes around making a creative work?”’

Ex1: ‘The most important thing for me is that the creative project drives the critical project. The questions for the critical come out of the creative, they come out of the interests of the student and where they want to push their creative practice.’

Ex2: ‘I’m saying that really for examining creative writing PhDs in my limited experience you set more weight on the creative component. At the same time the element that’s really examinable in a way is the critical component ...’

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you can grade that more or less in the way that you would grade any other academic PhD but paradoxically the more important element of the PhD is the one that's difficult to grade.'

Grad1: 'My understanding was that the critical would feed the creative and the creative would feed the critical. The critical component was using craft to interrogate the book or the language, rather than using literary criticism.'

Grad2: 'The critical project is a practically minded analysis of literary texts that could inform and strengthen and ... perform a kind of instructive role in relation to the writing project.'

My aim for this research was to create a feedback loop of information about the critical/creative nexus from people who are members of the IIML community of practice. I hoped also to collect and share practical ideas from graduates, supervisors and examiners on how to work through or with the tensions surrounding the critical/creative nexus. In line with that, the purpose of this report is to make the whole content of the six interviews available so that readers can investigate issues which might be of particular interest to them.

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Setting the Context

In December 2014 I carried out six exploratory interviews with participants in the PhD programme at the International Institute of Modern Letters (IIML), Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand to explore the relationships between the critical and creative components of the PhD as understood by these particular individuals.

The interviews produced a large volume of information. I have reported on aspects of the interview data in a conference paper titled "Opportunity, Fixed Points and the Space In-between: The Creative Writing PhD at the International Institute of Modern Letters (Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand)". This paper, which focuses on practical suggestions made in the interviews, will appear in the refereed section of the 2016 AAWP conference proceedings.

This report contains a description of the research method as well as all the interview data.
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It also contains a section I have called 'Reflections' where I have highlighted certain features of the data and speculated on possible reasons for that situation or implications of a situation. These 'reflections' are my personal views and do not represent the views of IIML. I have also highlighted possible directions for future research.

At the time of the interviews the critical component was a much-discussed topic among IIML PhD students (I was one from 2010-2013) and supervisors. In the first year, students were concerned with the form of the critical component, establishing their own critical voice and coming to an understanding of the role the critical component would play in their project. In the final stage before submission students were concerned with how examiners would assess the critical component and therefore how they could defend the choices made early on in regard to the critical component.

The discussions among students seemed to me to have an anxious and repetitive quality. Little new information could be added, because none of us knew the answers to the questions we were asking. Often the end of the discussion would be that someone would decide to try a certain connection between the two components, and we would all conclude that we had no idea how much of an academic risk that decision posed. My own earlier background as an educational psychologist heightened my sensitivity to this as a piece of learner experience and framed it for me as a pedagogical problem. Pedagogical problems, from my perspective, are situations where learning is not proceeding as smoothly as it could, because the learning environment is not helping as much as it could or should. In this case I saw it as a problem that students did not know, even broadly, where the fixed points were in the assessment of their PhD in relation to the critical component, and therefore could not gauge the likelihood that any particular decision would cause them to 'fail'.

I was aware at the time of the interviews that there had been considerable research attention to creative writing PhDs, especially in Australia. The early focus, exemplified in Text Special Issue 3 "Illuminating the Exegesis" in 2004, had been on the nature and purpose of the critical element. More recently, concerns over examination standards has been a focus in Webb Brien and Burr (2012). However there are a number of reasons why Australian research cannot be assumed to apply directly to the New Zealand, or more specifically, the IIML situation. IIML has a very distinct writing culture, for example, and the IIML PhD does not use the term 'exegesis'. In addition, the IIML PhD is relatively new, which means the body of experience is limited. To date the Australian-based research has not included New Zealand perspectives so we cannot know that our experience or views are represented in the total picture presented.

IIML's distinctive writing culture, which has been successful in generating a lively writing community and a great many publications, might be assumed to have an influence on practice in the PhD. IIML describes its approach as follows:

Our courses do not teach a specific set of predetermined skills. Rather, our aim is to develop the imaginative capacity and individual literary skills and voices of emerging writers, in a stimulating workshop environment. (victoria.ac.nz accessed 26 Jan 2017)

While this is not a detailed description of pedagogy for the PhD, it is a description of general priorities and methods. This approach places emphasis on aesthetics and creativity rather than on a hierarchy of techniques or the study of literary criticism. Given that at the time of the interviews more than half the PhD students were IIML MA graduates, it is reasonable to assume that this background might influence their aims for the PhD, their attitude to critical writing and their skills on entry to the PhD.

It seemed to me that in this relatively early stage in the development of the IIML PhD, when there had been no other research which focused directly on it, a simple, local, and potentially useful step would be to ask a range of people in the community of practice around the IIML for their views on the critical/creative nexus, and to make these views available to anyone interested.

In the normal course of events PhD students do not have direct access to examiner perspectives until their own thesis is examined. In addition, many completed IIML PhD theses are embargoed to allow the author to explore publication, so it is very difficult for students to see a body of completed theses and impossible for a student to see theses together with examiner reports. Supervisors, who are the main structural conduit for distilled examiner perspectives to reach students, might be assumed to have more experience to draw on, but in the case of a fairly new programme, a particular supervisor's experience of examiner feedback, or experience as an examiner, might still be small.

In compiling the interview questions I took the view that neither the degree itself nor any individual component of the degree exists in isolation, but rather that the day to day practice of participants is the result of a complex network of inter-related ideas and contingencies. I have used the term 'nexus' to accommodate the complexity and concentration of the connections between the critical and creative components of the thesis.

The fact that all PhD theses need to be clearly a whole and in this case show connection between the two components is obviously a significant element of the nexus.

The critical/creative nexus also includes considerations like whether the critical or creative component is written first, how the content of one influences the content of the other, which would be presented first in the thesis and how a 'bridging chapter' between the elements works. Pedagogical considerations like the skills needed to complete each component, the hallmarks of a successful and unsuccessful critical project, how examiners think about and assess the two components and the ways supervisors assist students to formulate the relationship between critical and creative elements in their projects are also aspects of the nexus. I was also interested in the style and form of the critical components and how much 'room to manoeuvre' there might be for critical work which was not traditional expository academic prose.

From the IIML point of view there was interest in canvassing participants' views on the possibility of a PhD in Creative Writing which had a reduced or no critical component. There was also interest in the idea of the critical/creative nexus as a culture clash between the 'not knowing' stance which is a deliberately chosen aspect of the IIML MA in Creative Writing and the authority which is the hallmark of scholarly criticism. These topics formed the basis of the interview questions for this study.

The study received seeding funding from IIML and a grant from the Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

The IIML PhD

Since its beginning in 2008 the IIML PhD has rapidly become popular with students, both as a sequel to the IIML MA and for students from other situations. To date (February 2017) there have been twenty two graduates of the PhD and more than half have published novels, collections of poems, scripts and hybrid texts based on the PhD.

On its website IIML outlines the structure of the PhD.

The IIML thesis typically has a creative and critical component, although it can also be a hybrid combining both. The creative component is 'about 60% of the research for the degree' and the critical component 'about 40% of the research for the degree'.

The outline describes the critical component as 'an academic/scholarly study contextualising the creative component', stipulates that it must be a 'complimentary critical study' and cannot be a discussion of the process of the research or writing, and indicates that it 'will normally be about 30,000 words'. (Victoria.ac.nz accessed 03 Feb 2017)

Method

In consultation with Damien Wilkins, Director of IIML and coordinator of the PhD programme, I identified a group of six individuals who had taken part in the IIML PhD programme and asked them to take part in the project. All six agreed to participate. Participants were given code names to keep their identity confidential on the assumption that this would make it easier for them to talk freely. Participants' names and institutional affiliations are known to myself and Damien Wilkins.

Grad1 and Grad2 were recent graduates, Sup was a current supervisor and SupEx had co-supervised and examined IIML PhD students and students from other universities. Ex1 and Ex2 had examined an IIML thesis and supervised and examined Creative Writing PhD projects at other universities.

I interviewed each participant in December 2014. An Interview Schedule was used as a loose structure to the interview. The interview process was as informal as possible and emphasis was placed on eliciting each person's views and teasing out the rationale for them, rather than asking questions in a particular order.

Certain questions were specific to supervisors, students or examiners. When a participant showed interest in a particular topic, I followed that to its natural end rather than requiring all participants to devote the same amount of time to each question. This approach means that not every participant gave views on each question.

The academic creative writing community of New Zealand, and of IIML within that, is small. In this context participants could not be completely unknown to the researcher or vice versa. I have interviewed many people about their work and in this situation there was a noticeable sense of generosity and support for creative writing and the PhD degree in the conversations, alongside descriptions of tensions or strong views about how the degree was working.

Participants were able to access the Interview Schedule before the interviews. Two of the six participants requested this. The Interview Schedule was present on the table during all interviews to allow participants to pick out topics of particular interest to them.

I transcribed the interviews during 2015. Participants were offered the opportunity to correct any errors in the transcript. One participant requested small changes which have been made in this report.

Scope of the project

The purpose of the project was to collect preliminary qualitative data to stimulate discussion.

The data cannot be extrapolated to represent the views of all participants in the IIML PhD programme, or even a majority view.

Participants say in these interviews that these ideas are their *current* (2014) views of the PhD creative writing situation they are engaged with. They also say that the field is very much still evolving. It is possible that two year later their personal views might have changed or institutional practice solidified in some ways.

I have not investigated other creative writing doctoral programmes in New Zealand. I have tried instead to examine our own practice in some detail. It is worth noting though that by interviewing examiners, the study has drawn on the experience of people from other universities. In their comments examiners compare and contrast IIML theses with others they have marked or supervised. So in this sense the study does contain wider perspectives, including experiences from outside of New Zealand.

Interview Data

I have reported each question together with all participants' answers to that question because I believe that allows for the richest and most complex reading of the results. For example, a reader could follow the views of one participant about all questions, or focus on the different views expressed in respect of one question.

Participants' responses are broken into specific ideas. These ideas are treated as units and numbered. Typically the ideas are an opinion and an explanation, a rationale or an account of some experience. Participants' own words have been retained in the summaries, but a small number of comments are presented in a different position from where they appeared in the interview.

Question 1: How do you understand the purpose/s of the critical project?

SupEx:

1. The critical element has two purposes.
2. One is administrative and bureaucratic. It frames the creative element and makes the PhD in CW look more similar to other Humanities PhDs.
3. I'm not sure if this actually works.
4. But the other purpose is that engagement with the critical, reflective, theoretical side contributes to the creative side.
5. Some students might find the critical and the creative do have some quite close constructively interactive relation to each other.

6. I imagine that quite a lot of PhD students coming to IIML who haven't come from a particularly academic background but are very talented writers would find the critical aspect a clog and a chore.
7. Creative writing practitioners might prefer the autonomy of a creative work to stand for itself rather than be propped up or made to look respectable by the critical component.
8. You don't have to have a critical component for an MA at the IIML. You do have an annotated and reflective diary of what you have been reading. But that's quite different from studying narratology because you are writing narrative poems. Quite properly in my view the IIML basically tries to teach creative writing, not critical writing.

Sup:

1. One purpose would be to add a kind of depth of field to the creative project ... even if the critical component does not visibly appear on the surface of the finished creative product it's likely it's an iceberg underneath.
2. So there's a kind of big thought base underneath this thing up the top that doesn't look necessarily like an intellectual production on the face of it ... and sometimes in it ... particularly in a hybrid kind of thesis.
3. It need not be visible to anyone other than the supervisor and the writer and ideally the examiner.
4. In my first co-supervision ... I was the one who was probably always fretting about how visible is the research, how visible does the research have to be in a hybrid product to satisfy both sides of the equation as a single coherent thing ...

Ex2:

1. Partly the critical component is there I think to provide a piece of academic writing that can be graded in the conventional way, so as an examiner you have that sense that 'OK here's something I can grade and like I grade a conventional academic PhD whereas grading the creative component I feel slightly at sea.
2. You can summon the reasons why you think this novel works as a piece of fiction or the areas in which it doesn't but I'm never quite clear that I'm sort of grading that with the same rigour or sense of what I'm doing as I am when I'm grading a conventional academic PhD.
3. So yes, what I understand it as, you're contextualising the creative component and to some extent maybe an explication of the techniques and the kind of intentions of the author but yeah I'm pretty vague as to precisely what the relationship between the two parts might be.

Grad2:

1. The critical project is a practically minded analysis of literary texts that could inform and strengthen and ... perform a kind of instructive role in relation to the writing project.

Question 2: How do you understand the relationship between critical and creative components?**Sup:**

1. The critical work is feeding the creative work.
2. ... Among other things ... looking very closely at how other writers have done that thing that the student is interested in doing in a general sense ... it's not in any way imitative. It's more 'Here's how other people have approached an area I'm interested in working in and this is what they've done with it, now how might I generate my own original approach in this field?'
3. I'm not sure as a supervisor I would be able to put my finger on the relationship between X in the critical component and Y in the creative but my sense is that there's a relationship in there somewhere.
4. One of the things that differentiates the creative [writing] PhD from a standard academic PhD I think is that interest in the craft of writing as opposed to a sort of post facto analysis of what's on the page, so it's the practical 'how to' aspect as opposed to the critical 'What has been done and what might we make of that?'
5. I do have a sense that it goes rather more easily and more smoothly for all concerned if there's an English Department supervisor rather than a cross-disciplinary supervisor as the other supervisor.
6. I love what the cross-disciplinary stuff adds to it but it does mean that the entire burden of the literary theoretical side falls on the primary supervisor.
7. But I guess ... a lot of people everywhere in the university are supervising PhDs that are not their particular narrow specialist research area so we all have to upskill ourselves to some extent with any PhD. That's I guess part of what's involved for the supervisor.

Ex1:

1. The most important thing for me is that the creative project drives the critical project.
2. The questions for the critical come out of the creative, they come out of the interests of the student and where they want to push their creative practice.
3. There are different models for different students.

4. I think immediately trying to work out what the student is there for [is important] and how that balance is going to work. Some of them really want to do a serious literary critical project and that's as important and how do they work best.
5. I think if we've got these creative PhDs we actually have to believe in the creative work.
6. I've just been to the AAWP conference and listening to a lot of PhD students talk there I did feel like a critical mode had kind of taken over as the way one talks and in a way that seems like it doesn't quite believe that the creative work really is of equal if not more significant value.

Ex2:

1. This is one of the nubs of the whole Creative Writing PhD project is what is the connection between these two component parts?
2. It seems to me sometimes that there's a slight redundancy in the critical component if the critical component is a kind of explication of what's taking place in the creative section.
3. That *can* work very well. For example one I examined [not IIML] was an excellent short novel and the critical component was a study of XX's short stories demonstrating the techniques the writer was taking from XX and deploying in her own novel so there was quite an organic relationship between the components.
4. At the same time I felt a dissatisfaction with that for that very reason that...the writer was sort of coming forward and addressing me directly about what was happening in the novel which as a reader of the novel you think well that's not kind of my business ... but I guess it's a kind of inescapable part of the Creative writing PhD partly because [of] the question of the ... examinability ... of the whole thesis.
5. I think the idea that there should be a kind of symbiotic relationship between the two components is right. Of course there's no reason why there shouldn't be. I know from my own practice as a writer that even the sort of daily task of getting your five hundred words or whatever it is, is often fuelled by burst of reading. Reading is kind of absolutely essential fuel to the creative process so ideally there should be a sense in which these two elements work together.
6. I suppose from a writer's point of view a slightly potentially difficult element of that is making visible what is the kind of scaffolding. You want to walk away at the end and say 'This is what you judge. Here is the book' instead of having 'This is how I did this', a kind of behind the scenes quality of impairing the finish of your work by ... kind of snapshots of the scaffolding that was there before you knocked it away.
7. I suppose there's a kind of commentary element sometimes to the critical component, it's almost a kind of 'record of the process of composition', which can have some value, but again I'm not sure the critical component could stand with that simply at its core. You'd want more than that although that is quite useful I think

from the examiner's point of view to see how the writer envisaged and the sort of processes by which the writer arrived at the choices he or she made.

8. I think one of the dangers in trying to set out and stipulate what the relationship between the components should be is, it's liable to be the case in a creative writing PhD that that relationship has to develop differently for every project.
9. [In writing a novel] you had to find a way of dealing with the material you were evolving as you went and I suspect that a similar thing is true of the relationship between the critical and creative components of the creative writing PhD, that it's possibly not something that you can set out in advance with any great degree of clarity about what that relationship should be, that it might be something that evolves from the process itself, which again makes it slightly more problematic from the point of view of supervisors and examiners but I'm not sure there's a way round it.

Grad1:

1. My understanding was that the critical would feed the creative and the creative would feed the critical.
2. The critical component was using craft to interrogate the book or the language, rather than using literary criticism.
3. In my head, when I was doing English and using literary critical structures to investigate things I was sort of pulling them apart to see how they worked, like a frog when you dissect it, whereas what I recognised was that the critical in the PhD for Creative Writing would be more about trying to make a frog.
4. I kind of feel the novel is the frog and the critical was the instruction manual for the frog.
5. It's not quite as simple as that because I was acutely aware that it wasn't a self-reflective 'how I wrote my novel' kind of thing.
6. The critical and the creative moved together at the same time.
7. From day one I was writing both, which I really really liked and worked really well for me.
8. There's often a lot of energy around that critical [in supervision] and the creative is kind of taking care of itself.

Grad2:

1. I think both the critical and creative projects were answering the same question. I had a strong idea of what my research question was and I felt that they were both following that question through to the furthest development of my thinking on it.
2. The urgent requirement was to learn how to write basically, and ... that influenced the shape of my critical project.

3. The critical work was pretty much sealed [before starting the creative component] although I became aware at a certain point that I would be writing short stories so I added a chapter [to the critical] that dealt with the short stories of Joyce Carol Oates.
4. I wrote the introduction to the creative work [the bridging chapter] and things like that last.

Question 3: How do students reach an understanding of the critical/creative relationship in their own project?

Sup:

1. I think there's a certain amount of, and I don't mean this entirely negatively, wallowing about in the mire, that has to go on.
2. In terms of that very separate two-component PhD there's just a lot of reading through the territory to be done at the beginning and I think it might be that for quite a long time [students] are not sure what the relationship is or is going to be.
3. It may be more clear to some people than others what the connection is.
4. There's always that temptation to go too wide I suspect and part of the business of moving from your original research question to the thing that goes in as your final proposal is figuring out what chunk of the territory you're going to make your own so it's figuring out what to leave out as well as what to leave in I think and that's part of the wallowing process too.
5. There's also the question of how theory, in the way that conventional academia would apply it, is going to inform either component of the PhD.
6. Going back to the craft element again there's a kind of critical thinking around craft which tends to go on in the world of practising writers in a way that it doesn't go on or isn't always recognised as legitimate academic thinking in the world of the professional critic.
7. So I think there's a kind of figuring out process of 'where is that line going to be drawn in my particular version of a PhD between academic criticism as we might understand it and the particular kind of critical thinking that goes around making a creative work?'
8. Access to information about how their predecessors have worked things through is a useful thing, even down to things like 'at a certain point in your research you may feel a bit lost and that's kind of normal'.
9. So I do think there's a big value in just having access to prior documentation and that's on the very practical level as well as the more nebulous – not losing that institutional memory because particular institutional memories are particular to either supervisors or students with whom you may have no direct connection or who

may not be in the building or in the university anymore – that’s where those exit interviews are probably a really useful resource – where you’ve had the odd person sit down and reflect on their experience in whatever way they choose to do that.

10. I think that’s a great resource because unlike the Masters programme where people really are a community in a week by week ongoing way I think that’s less true of the PhD and increasingly less true as more and more people are coming from outside of Wellington to be part of it.

Ex1:

1. I think more slowly than the one year proposal would suggest.
2. They [students I have supervised] started with the intuitive sense of what really interests them.
3. From that there’s been a whole lot of possible connections and ways of defining it.
4. Then over time those are refined down to the two or three central ideas.
5. I think that partly students have to keep on writing their own [creative] stuff to be finding that.
6. I think they need to be reading and brainstorming around the critical but also need to be keeping writing the creative to keep themselves asking that question about ‘What am I trying to do? What am I interested in? What do I need to know? What am I stuck on? Where do I go next?’
7. And I do think they really need a sense of permission to be interested in what they’re interested in.
8. I’ve heard people talking, and this is IIML people talking, there can be a sense that the critical is this weird thing that is imposed from the outside and it’s kind of a foreign body in their PhD.
9. If they can understand it as theirs to own I do think that helps them to see ... find the relationship.
10. When I did my critical PhD I think they might have talked to us in terms of actually having to be honest about what you’re really interested in and following that line, no matter how weird it seems at first. That’s more likely to produce interesting work.
11. Which doesn’t mean students don’t need to find a more sophisticated vocabulary for what they’re saying because I think that quite often people will be following a line but it’s quite naïve, and I think the supervisor’s job is not just burst the bubble but to find a way to give people access to new languages for what they’re actually trying to say and accept that they can’t do every leap all at once.
12. In terms of recommended reading I think it needs to be pretty carefully done. I always think about my own supervisor and it often took me about a year to work out why she wanted me to read a certain book.

Question 4: What helps students get to that understanding?

Ex1:

1. Really practical things like an ongoing annotated bibliography are so useful because they [students] know when they encountered a text, they know what they thought at that point, they can go back and read it and quite often it's been revised as you go along as well. You can go back and think 'Oh, now I understand'.
2. I think part of the challenge of the PhD is the long project, the long time period and the length and you need some really good system.
3. An annotated bibliography shouldn't just be critical. It should be the wide creative reading.
4. If you're doing annotated bibliography you're not having to form your arguments before you're ready and you can write down intuitive things about what their argument is and it *seems* to connect to my argument in these ways and then, you've got those in three years' time.
5. There's also that lovely moment in research where suddenly you're reading something and you realise that you've read all the references. That's about the moment when you are ready to stop reading and start entering the conversation.

Grad1:

1. The research proposal was helpful because it was structured in a very conventionally academic way, you know there'll be a research problem, a methodology, a literature review, what the chapters are going to be.
2. I found that framework very good as well because I had to kind of squash this thing into that and it was kind of broad enough to let it bleed out over the edges but it was tight enough that I didn't feel like I was going to arrive after six months and find I was on the wrong track.
3. [In terms of supervision] My experience was that in the first year they [supervisors] were the experts and I was the student then in the second year we were on a par and then in the third year I should be the expert and they are the readers.
4. At the beginning there was input [from supervisors] but I never felt like I *had* to do that or it would be no good.
5. I'm pretty sure we always met together [for supervision] which I found extremely helpful. Their [two supervisor's] relationship was great and it felt like we were all moving into this space which hadn't quite fully been built yet which was really nice.
6. It did feel like there was this tension [between the ideas each supervisor had] but definitely I felt very free which I *really* appreciated.
7. It [my supervision] was an absolute perfect blend of scaffolding but also freedom.

Question 5: What makes a good critical project?

Ex1:

1. A lot of the critical projects do just look like a sort of close reading study of a couple of other authors.
2. I think it's been quite useful for people that they had a more conceptual overarching, or a cultural type question, eg, a Vietnam war novel where the sort of overarching question was around how you depict people who have gone through experiences like that and around the idea of learned helplessness and the candidate had another discipline to refer to and they did a good job of it, and they had a real question about how you represent subjectivities which they then looked at in some texts, other peoples' texts, and they tried to work with in their own.
3. Some students will not start at the conceptual level at all and they will enter through the texture of another text and then they might come up and realise what the wider answers are and then some students will find their way into bigger questions that way.
4. I found the kind of wider questions interesting around what writing is doing, in a wider cultural context rather than just the formal question.
5. Some people are very very interested in formal questions and that that is obviously also a good approach.
6. Maybe the ideal is to have a content thing that you're exploring but then have a very specific formal approach you're trying to work out how to you're going to take.
7. When I say the ideal I think maybe I just mean something that then becomes manageable for everyone to discuss, to work with and talk about.
8. I think it's more useful if you are trying to think pretty closely about how a critical piece would help creative writers and yourself than if you just thought you were going to come in and write a little short English PhD which sat off over there, on its own. And you were doing a creative something else.
9. [The critical work should be] something open. If you think about the fine arts kind of equivalent; [they do] something that is still open and experimental where the critical is also exploratory and forward-leaning.
10. A literary critical project is saying what has been done and the critical project in a creative PhD should be trying to think about what comes next.
11. From the outset, the critical [component] needs to be part of the pleasure as well, part of the exploration. We're doing two things, two kinds of writing and they both have to be, not pleasurable all the time, but a sense of the exploration that they're going to engage with.

Question 6: Defending the writer's patch as critical thinker

Sup:

1. I'd like to put a stake in the ground for a writerly idea of criticism as opposed to a purely academic idea of criticism.
2. I certainly get a sense that there's a need to defend the writer's patch as a critical thinker and to defend the craft-oriented aspects of PhD research as being legitimate academic research in this context.
3. My guess is a number of examiners would find it easier to deal with the critical component if it conformed to, for example, the classic English Department PhD on a famous writer.
4. But we are, and should be, staking out a different territory here; territory that certainly has plenty of elements in common with the traditional academic PhD but which also plants a flag in the ground for the creative part, across both elements of the PhD i.e. that they are in a sense one thing even if the two components look quite different and seem to be behaving quite differently on the page
5. I quite like the idea of planting a stake in the ground for friendly criticism; friendly in the sense of reader-friendly, not overly captured by specialist diction and theory.
6. It might well provide an extensive bibliography. It might even be footnoted but I'm interested in a critical component that is as readable in its own way as the creative component is.
7. The ultimate expression of that is the hybrid PhD, the thing that doesn't separate the two things at all, but I don't think that's going to be the thing that everyone wants to write.

Grad1:

1. The really successful PhDs that I can think about that have come out of there [IIML] have said 'this is the discipline I'm working in and this is how we're going to do it'. Sort of re-claimed the parameters of it.
2. The [critical] problem can be investigated through creativity.

Question 7: What does this writerly critical work look like?

Ex1:

1. The sense that the expertise in the creation of a text is part of what critical works that are part of creative PhDs might be able to contribute.

2. [If they do this] they are new and different from what a literary critical [project] might do, not just a small, slightly weak version of literary critical things would do, more inside the text, the creation of a text.

Ex2:

1. One of the elements in the critical component [in one PhD project] that worked extremely well was actually a short story.
2. On the face of it [a short story] is quite obviously speculative and not the kind of methodology that would satisfy the most rigorous of PhD examiners but it actually worked extremely well because it allowed for a much more nuanced and sensitive and undogmatic approach to the material and it really made me think actually more criticism could be couched in this form.
3. It reminded me of Noctes Ambrosianae, a great running element in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, which was a symposium form where various characters would discuss the topics of the day and often involve literature.
4. It made me think there's scope there for the techniques of creative writing to illuminate the practice of literary criticism.
5. And there was something about that Kundera line about the wisdom of uncertainty, something about that lack of an explicit thesis and the marshalling of evidence to support a line of argument that actually made this a much more generous piece of criticism than might otherwise have been the case. So that opened my eyes to certain possibilities in the kind of relationship between the two elements.

Grad1:

1. I always wonder about the critical if there *is* a way of re-inventing it so that we can use what we learn in creative writing – so that Masters work that we did in creative writing can be used in the critical ...

Question 8: Is there a bad version of a critical project?

Sup:

1. The 'PhD novel', a work that has been generated more out of critical than out of artistic impulses.

Ex1:

1. 'These people, these people, these people – inadequate in some way and my work fills that gap' and sometimes taking too easy examples and saying why they're not working.
2. As writer you want the richest possible and the most inspiring or complex examples.
3. You have to create a space for difference in a PhD. What they would call a contribution to knowledge but space for your own project but you want the sophisticated version of making that space.

Question 9: Hybrid theses

(This topic was raised by Sup)

Sup:

1. Possibly in the academic context the hybrid PhDs look less familiar to external examiners and therefore they are having to make their own kind of assessment of this new kind of thing that looks different from other PhDs that they might have previously examined, so I think that has the potential to be an issue.
2. It would be useful to have a document to send to creative PhD examiners that really gives a good steer as to how we see the degree being structured and whether it's a critical/creative separate or [a]hybrid one – some kind of sense of how we imagine they might approach the examining process without obviously being too directive about that.
3. Even if you were presented with a critical/creative split PhD I think it would be interesting to know that there's also this hybrid version and vice versa – that's kind of an interesting piece of information for an examiner to have.

Question 10: Could you imagine a PhD in creative writing where there was no critical component and the creative work was the thesis?**SupEx:**

1. My personal perspective is that the critical component shouldn't be a requirement.
2. I think there are all sorts of kind of deep and systemic problems with having the two component parts.

3. There are other programmes, say film and theatre, which are primarily academic programmes. I don't see why there shouldn't be a mixture of the creative and the critical in those programmes because the expectation is that people will have moved through those programmes or equivalent to arrive at the PhD.

Sup:

1. I don't have a clear view on [whether the creative writing PhD doesn't need or shouldn't have a critical component].
2. On the one hand in terms of practical process and ease of passage I suspect it would be a lot easier for a lot of people not to have the critical component but then what makes it an academic degree is the other question.
3. Part of me feels that if you just want to go and write your novel or your next collection of poems, is there any need to make a PhD out of that?
4. So I do have some sympathy for the idea that if it is going to be called a PhD and is going to be a degree that has that level of recognition in wider academia – not just in prestige but in terms of teaching positions then it feels to me like some kind of hard thinking needs to be behind it and it does interest me to think about how you would examine such a PhD in terms of its difference from the product of the MA workshop for example.
5. I think 'original contribution' is possibly almost too easy because every novel is an original contribution in some respect, but scholarship? It would be a lot easier to point to scholarship in a hybrid PhD and less obvious in an entirely creative one.
6. I suppose if we start going back to some kind of mid-way position like the exegesis idea that they have in Australia that you'll write an explanation that tells the examiner 'this is the research I did' – that's something I would not be in favour of.
7. I'm not sure what value it adds to the PhD or to the world to have that 'how I wrote my novel' account sitting attached to the novel.

Ex2:

1. I think part of the problem there is the generic capaciousness and instability of the novel as a form. It might be better in other literary genres but just thinking of the novel for the time being, almost anything can be a novel, as Bakhtin says in that great metaphor of the novel as this kind of capacious maw that can absorb anything.
2. I think that's partly why you need the kind of critical component.
3. Certainly as an examiner I would feel completely at sea in trying to examine a creative writing PhD that was simply a novel.
4. I'm saying that really for examining creative writing PhDs in my limited experience you set more weight on the creative component. At the same time the element that's really examinable in a way is the critical component – you can grade that more

or less in the way that you would grade any other academic PhD but paradoxically the more important element of the PhD is the one that's difficult to grade.

5. I'm not sure if there's a coherent logic in my position here but these are just the tensions that are thrown up by bringing the creative writing qualification up to this PhD standard.
6. So that's whilst we're doing it, but I think there's still more thought that needs to go into how we actually describe what's happening here.

Question 11: How do Bridging Chapters work and how important are they?

Sup:

1. I don't feel that the links between the two things need necessarily to be laid out for the reader in a blow by blow way but I can see the value particularly in terms of the examining process of a bridging essay or an introductory piece that might sit between the critical and creative components in which a student might briefly reflect on how they see the two things being joined or related.
2. It's the hallway you walk through from one room to the other.
3. It's some kind of an introduction to the creative process of this PhD as I see it and perhaps a pointing towards without necessarily being too explicit about the way the critical has underpinned the creative work.
4. It's big in significance in the sense that it makes the belonging-togetherness of the two things more visible both to the student and to the examiner.

Ex1:

1. I think it [the bridging chapter or bridging essay] is really important. It's really helpful as an examiner and probably quite helpful for the student – well probably helpful for all of us for understanding what these creative PhDs are teaching us about how people create work.
2. I quite like the idea that there's room for them [students] to talk in sophisticated terms about the journey of the project, that they can actually explain how and why things have been approached in the way they have.
3. I think they can take lots of forms like Eavan Boland's *Object Lesson*, about how she came to be a poet in Ireland basically, but it's about particular poems but it's also quite a personal narrative about how she came to write things.
4. You [the student] can't do many long long close readings of the writer's text because there isn't room and that feels odd. I feel like as an examiner you'd feel told how to read things.

5. It needs to be reasonably brief and conceptually throw up the interesting things and formal questions that are happening.
6. There's a vocabulary which has been acquired in the critical which can be used in the bridging chapter but often nuanced slightly.
7. If you're going to take a bad example it is again 'why my text is better than anyone else's'. Then it just asks the examiner to say why it's not,
8. There is room for 'This is as far as we've got. Another step would be this'.
9. I feel like they [students] have to have an eye on the examiner but examiners can only be the person who is looking over your shoulder at the end as you speak to another audience and I think about any piece of writing, you can't be talking to the judge. You've got to be performing what you do and the judge can judge.

Grad1:

1. [One supervisor] directed me to these things in scientific theses called 'Reflections' and it identifies new areas that might be good for further study, things I didn't find completely convincing. Those reflections were the self-reflective part of it and they were done right at the end.
2. It was saying this is what didn't work, this is why, so it wasn't really a bridging statement.
3. They [the novel and the critical] do feel like quite separate things which is odd when you think about how they were written.
4. They had two contents pages as well, so it was just like you'd taken two things and sat them in the binding of the thesis.

Question 12: What is the role of a research question? Are they necessary or helpful?

SupEx:

1. The nature of how the PhD in creative writing is currently set up means that whether there was one [research question] or not, there has to be one to justify the presence of the critical component.
2. Potentially there could be some kind of research question involving the creative writing side but then it would manifest itself in a different kind of way, e.g. be diffused or implicit.
3. The candidate's Expression of Interest would contain potential research questions or an overarching question.

Sup:

1. In the broad sense the research question is the thing around which academic rigour starts to cohere.
2. The research question in its very nature requires coherent thought, coherent research and to be working towards an answer that a creative outcome might choose not to give.
3. I'm thinking about light and shadow in a way. In the critical component perhaps it the research question is the spotlight, and in the creative component it is the shadow around the spotlight.
4. In the critical component there's a shiny tip of coherent thought that any educated person could read through and think 'yes, that makes sense to me' or 'there's an argument here that I don't buy' or whatever.
5. There's the – more or less – depending on the individual – murky penumbra of stuff immediately outside that spot-lit circle; that might be the creative component's terrain.
6. Obviously the hybrid PhD [combined critical and creative work] is another kettle of fish.
7. The idea of the creative component is the answer to the research question; that notion appeals to me.
8. But I suppose the nature of creative writing itself is that it's not setting out to give the kind of clear answers that one might wish for from a piece of critical writing and nor should it be asked to. That's where we start to get 'the PhD novel'.

Ex2:

1. [One] particular PhD [not from IIML] didn't really address a research question in the way that a conventional academic PhD would. It was more a question of technique – the writer had identified key techniques as she saw it of XX's short stories and she was deploying these in her own work – which I guess differs from how some people might regard the PhD as an entity.
2. I suppose one way of doing it would be to have the research question addressed in a more conventional expository fashion in the critical component and then addressed differently in the novel.
3. One of the potential points of tension between the critical and creative components relates to this question of addressing a research topic or a research question and I'm not entirely convinced that it makes an awful lot of sense to look at a work of fiction as something that addresses a research question. Yes, you could do that but you're not really reading it as a work of literature in that respect.
4. I definitely think there's a danger in the creative Writing PhD that if we emphasise this stipulation that they're addressing a research question it possibly leads us to take a reductive view of the novel.

5. The authorial point of view may be decipherable by implication in a novel [but] it's not been said in that straightforward expository way as a thesis would be or could be in the critical component so it's the fact that you're dealing with two categorically different types of activity or discourse so inevitably the question of how they connect and speak to one another is going to be slightly fraught.
6. To the extent that any piece of academic or critical prose pretty much of necessity prosecutes some kind of argument or thesis and again to the extent that an argument or thesis is readily identifiable in a work of fiction you could argue that to that extent it has failed.
7. I'm very persuaded by Kundera's argument that a work of fiction is always bigger than the subject it addresses so it's very reductive to look at a novel for example in that kind of instrumental way as some kind of research question.
8. I'm not sure if you can present works of fiction for grading at PhD level without some kind of reductive dimension creeping in.
9. If we're looking at addressing a kind of more abstract research question I think we're liable to find that we've got two distinct and to some extent self-contained pieces of writing.

Grad1:

1. I think having a research question was helpful for me.
2. Where it became helpful was at the very end. I didn't slavishly stick to that research question the whole way through but at the end I realised that I had done this massive circuit and come back to it which I found quite useful.
3. All the time, without thinking about it, I was thinking about the Research Question and I'd been working around the Research Question but ignoring it, if you know what I mean, and so I think that that question is sort of latent in all the work.
4. In my project the critical and creative components *are* both answers to the same research question because the book [a novel] has been criticised for coming out of the PhD and being too polemic ...
5. The research question was 'How can the language of [X discipline] inform and enlarge fiction?' So in the critical I identified what this language was and possible ways that might be used in fiction, and then in the fiction I put that into action.
6. You can actually judge the thesis question through the [creative] work which I find quite exciting because it feels like the work has another purpose other than artistic which ... I quite like that.

Grad2:

1. The research question is a really useful way to ensure that the PhD remains a project. The research question gives it shape.

2. For someone who follows the model that I do, the critical question behind the critical project is 'How can I write this way? I'll read these novels in order to understand it.'
3. The question behind the creative component for writers like me is 'Can I write this way? Here I am putting it into practice. Can I write this way?'
4. On a more emotional kind of psychological level, those are the questions that the writer is really asking and in order to achieve the project they come up with a research question.
5. But I think the actual official research question, the one that is approved during the Research Proposal process and that the supervisors have agreed on and everybody has agreed that you are pursuing, that's the one that actually turns it into a project and gives it focus, gives it shape and ensures that you finish it.

Question 13: Why do you think students do a PhD in Creative Writing?

SupEx:

1. Advancement in their literary career. And possibly in some cases a qualification which will help them get a job which will also help them further their literary career.
2. I think some of them are doing it for, as it were, the extended practice.
3. Some of them are doing it for that but also with the hope of picking up a useful piece of paper which will further them.
4. I'm sure it works in terms of the practice. But whether it helps them with a career teaching creative writing, it must help some but given that in New Zealand there is a limited number of institutions where they could work I can't say whether it would ... how much cachet it would carry in an overseas context. Some perhaps.

Sup:

1. Develop their craft.
2. Make a first step on the career ladder in academia or teaching outside academia.
3. Gain or recover community.
4. Get detailed feedback on their creative work.
5. Test themselves academically.
6. The simple answer is 'they want to write a book'. And they would like to write a book in an environment that is supported both financially ideally in terms of a scholarship and creatively and critically in terms of the cohort and the supervision.
7. My sense is that most people are coming in thinking of themselves as writers first and academics second. That may be how it begins ... Maybe that shifts over the course of the PhD as they become more engaged with the critical project and start to see themselves more firmly as scholars or critics or whatever word you want to use

for it, or as they come to see the importance of the intellectual underpinnings for their creative project.

8. I guess there's probably a different balance of that for everyone who goes through it.

Ex1:

1. I think a lot of people are still just wanting a writing grant.
2. I think coming in that way can lead to quite a lot of alienation.
3. I think some students are really wanting to have a deep immersion in their craft with other people around them thinking about it with them... and that sense of extending their work to something new that is not just writing the next thing but possibly writing something stronger, something deeper in whatever way.
4. I think they might be thinking about the reading, their deep reading but not necessarily the writing about it and framing their way through it.
5. In Australia and America they're doing it to get jobs. That is not going to be a very useful road for New Zealand.

Ex2:

1. Even on the academic side of things to some extent you feel uneasy about taking on PhD students who anticipate working in academia because it's ... most of the time that's not going to happen and I think we've all got experience of excellent PhD students with books published and so on who find it impossible to get a job in academia.

Grad1:

1. At first it was probably about getting sanctioned time – perhaps getting a scholarship and some time and a place to write.
2. After I talked to [supervisors] I suddenly started getting excited about doing a creative writing project in an academic setting.
3. I think what I was really conscious of was that I wanted to write a second book and this seemed like the way to make the second book happen.
4. The other thing I was quite conscious of at the time was 'gaining a PhD'. That was something I always wanted to do so I think at the start I was probably thinking 'this is the way to get a book written' but also 'this is the way to get a qualification'.

Grad2:

1. I think I would have said that I wanted to continue my writing and because I wasn't really a published writer then – not in a real way – and I wanted to continue to learn how to get up to that standard I guess so I wanted to work out how to write and secondly, I think the kind of thing of trying to, wanting to satisfy that long-held desire

to study at that highest level in terms of ... in that tradition I guess of English literary critical study.

Question 14: What has the PhD given you?

Grad1:

1. I got surprising outcomes from it that I didn't really realise and a lot of them were about self-esteem and I feel like I can have an opinion now because I did a PhD.
2. I feel like I'm part of the community now – the academic creative writing community.
3. I think the biggest thing has been about it being hard and not giving up. Now when I look at the new work that I'm working on now I can think 'Oh it's too hard' and then I think 'Well you've had hard and worked through it before and you've completed'.
4. Not being afraid to approach that [when things are not working] academically rather than in feelings.
5. The great thing about the PhD was that publication wasn't on my mind for a lot of it. It was at the start but I very quickly saw that this was a space to experiment and not worry about that part so that's been really helpful.

Grad2:

1. I was set up to fit into a relatively straightforward format and that format was 'I'll do some creative reading which will then inform my creative writing' and that model and thinking about a project or a book as a sort of three or four years with a lot of purposeful reading at the beginning followed by purposeful writing at the end I think is a really good model for me to have in my professional life and I've tried to take it beyond.
2. It's much harder afterwards, obviously, because you have to go to work and you don't have access to the same kind of guidance and reading but I think that model is really useful and the PhD showed me that I can do that.
3. Another whole territory of my learning comes under the informal part [of the PhD], the part that came from the community we managed to establish. It was a *huge* part of what made my book in the end, not so much the [PhD] project but my book is an outcome of that community experience.
4. I was thinking about how that was established and I think some people put a lot of work into it, quite dedicated work in terms of early on – making sure people were invited to lunches and get-togethers, not in a big way but just in a kind of way that enabled a community to get going together and I think that anything that can help that happen strengthens every part of the PhD.

5. There's a certain amount of figuring it out for yourself and figuring out what's going to be best for your project and 'what's going to help my writing the most?' and those kinds of things and those conversations are best had over lunch.

Question 15: Do you think there are particular skills or particular backgrounds that a student needs to do the critical part of the project successfully?

SupEx:

1. In my experience how this [critical component] works depended to a large extent on how much the particular post-graduate student has been versed in English as an academic subject.
2. Someone is engaging at PhD level who might well not have undergraduate English.
3. This presents a problem because someone might be a really good writer but not have the critical literary background which would help them engage with this kind of material.
4. This is a PhD so they will be expected to demonstrate a degree of critical sophistication which doesn't necessarily bear any relation to their sophistication as a writer.
5. Given that the critical is a requirement there might be occasions when it could be helpful for a student to take some undergraduate or honours papers, depending on what the project is.
6. It would have to be concurrent.
7. If you take them on for a PhD you must reckon they are already a pretty good writer and you want to make space for them to produce a publishable novel, collection of poetry or stories etc., then that is perhaps the main criterion.
8. Having this extra ingredient [the critical component] is problematic and sits in a somewhat awkward relation to the creative side.

Sup:

1. The simple answer is that it's the kind of traditional academic skills of analysis and synthesis and obviously in the PhD context generating original thought [that are needed].
2. It might be important to have had prior academic experience i.e. a good undergraduate degree and a good MA as some kind of training when you walk in the door.

3. But you have brilliant people who've not been through the kind of conventional academic mill who might produce quite an extraordinary creative component and maybe are going to have to work a bit harder at finding their way to do a critical component in a way that is (a) congenial to them and (b) is sufficiently rigorous to pass muster as a PhD.
4. That's something we are working out as we go along to some extent.
5. What happens in the critical component may differ depending on how strong a student is in conventional academic training.
6. We are, and it's both wonderful and difficult at the same time, drawing on a pool of students who can't be expected to all have the same kind of basic academic set-up.
7. They have not all done the standard English degree for example which would be an easy way of assessing their general capability but even within those who have, there's no canon of reading that they can all be expected to have in common – and on that score I do think the PhD workshop is absolutely a good thing.
8. I am quite interested in the idea that people might be asked to go off and do actual coursework as an answer to some of those gaps.
9. Sometimes it might be course work in the specialist discipline – a way of gathering more information to feed the creative project as well as the critical project – or it might be – if there is a paper on offer say in the English Department on whatever it happens to be – in many ways that would be a relatively painless way of feeling like you'd got a survey of the territory.

Ex1:

1. This is all a work in progress for me.
2. Students coming in with such different skill sets is what I see in terms of just educational background.
3. At one point I thought you did need to have a really decent strong English critical background to do that kind of critical project.
4. I think I've moved away from that a bit because essentially I don't believe that's the only way to be a writer.
5. It seems to me there are lots of backgrounds a person could bring[to the PhD].
6. But my sense is they do need a strong background in something and an academic background of some sort because they will have to think in a particular academic mode.
7. I think it's too much to do a big creative project *and* completely learn some critical discourse, whatever that discipline is.
8. I think you need some really strong background. Whether that needs to be literary critical, I'm not sure.
9. A certain sophistication in talking about texts feels quite important.
10. I feel like every project has to be approached so differently.

Ex2:

1. Maybe yes, a degree in literature.
2. I've had a very painful experience examining a quite problematic academic PhD that had been written by a candidate who had no first degree in literature but had done a creative writing programme at the university in question and then was, on the basis of that, accepted into the PhD programme and that didn't work out particularly well.
3. It struck me that the kind of policing of those boundaries is going to be an increasing issue as creative writing programmes proliferate and take off.
4. I think the candidate's initial degree had been in chemistry and it struck me that if you let someone loose on a chemistry PhD who just had a degree in English, I know it's not directly comparable, but it was a kind of accident waiting to happen in my view, but whether from the other direction we're accepting people into creative writing PhDs who don't have whatever you're expecting, a kind of first degree in English, in literature or... Of course the primary criterion has to be that they have demonstrated accomplishment in writing, but again, if we're dealing with a PhD you know, this other dimension comes in doesn't it?

Grad1:

1. One of the hardest things for me and something I recognised when we were having workshops was this: I wasn't doing a PhD in my undergraduate discipline. I was learning entire new disciplines.
2. What really helped me was I found a book like 'The History of Literary Theory', a big sweeping thing.
3. I think one of the skills that people need when they come in is that really basic 'This is what scholarship looks like', 'This is what a conventional PhD looks like', 'This is the continuum that you are trying to fit your work into'.
4. I had a lot of trouble finding an academic ... finding my critical voice. Through doing the MA [in creative writing] I had tools for finding a creative voice but I'm not sure I had tools for finding a critical voice.

Grad2:

1. I think it's quite relevant to my PhD that I had some success at that [an Honours degree in English] and I found that I enjoyed it and found it quite fulfilling.
2. It certainly felt like I was leading from the critical. The critical project was foremost for me and I was pretty clear I would be doing that first because from my experience on the MA I felt that my reading would really inform my writing.
3. During the process and early on I was very nervous about the writing part of it. I felt on very strong ground as an English student and I was finding that the first part of the project, the critical project, was coming pretty freely.

4. Certainly if someone wants to write a project like I did then I think it would help them a great deal to have a background in the literary analysis kind of skills that I got from the university, but part of me doesn't want to be prescriptive in that way.
5. On balance I'd come down on the side of saying I suppose it might be important to know that you can write an expository essay sort of thing. It might be important to be confident in that or at least have some means of becoming confident in that before you enter it but I wouldn't like to restrict really exciting and potentially innovative writers with wonderful projects from entering the degree just because they don't have a background like mine, or because the critical project is not going to come as readily to them as it did for me.
6. If there was some way that a writer can be confident that they'll be able to write that kind of analytical non-fiction, then that's important I suppose. Somehow the writer needs to be made confident that they have the capacity to write the critical component because I think people get tangled up in it and it becomes a big big thing, something that turns them off the whole experience in a way and meanwhile they have the capacity to or are writing this extraordinary creative project and that's perhaps *not* a satisfactory outcome.

Question 16: If you had your PhD time again is there anything that you would do differently?

Grad1:

1. I would have had a bit more courage to shift the thesis more towards fine arts.
2. I would have been braver with the critical and I would have respected the creative slightly more.
3. I thought the critical was where I would struggle so it was where I thought I needed to show that I could operate on that level for the creative to stand.
4. I had this real understanding that the creative was kind of like the embarrassing sibling – you know – I'm a bit flaky cos I've written this novel but I can write critically.
5. I wanted to be taken seriously as an academic.
6. Through watching other people and reading other people's stuff I think I would have had the courage [now] to just say 'Well you catch up'.

Question 17: [As a supervisor or examiner] What would you tell a prospective student about the critical and creative elements?

Ex1:

1. I would try, from the outset, to get across that the critical needs to be part of the pleasure as well, part of the exploration, that we're doing two things, two kinds of writing and they both have to be not pleasurable all the time, but a sense of the exploration that they're going to engage with.

Ex2:

1. At a sort of practical level in supervising the PhD that I'm currently supervising it certainly made me think that focusing on identifying some of the key techniques [in a chosen writer's work] and applying these in a work of fiction – it's evident to me that's a more defensible way of, kind of a safer way of proceeding in a way than trying to have some over-arching topic which leaves you open to all sorts of queries. The scope for examiners to say well you haven't taken into account this seminal piece of research or you haven't alluded to this primary work of literature in the field is quite alarmingly large, whereas if you've got this kind of technical focus where you're identifying key techniques from the body of work of a particular writer and utilising them in your own work of fiction you've got that demonstrable organic connection between the two components of the thesis.
2. So to my mind you're possibly better to have a much more circumscribed – and I think that's possibly true of PhDs in general – that it's better to have a fairly circumscribed and defined topic that you can then refer out from rather than having a 'key to all mythologies' that fails to actually come up with the goods.
3. There may be ways to do that that don't leave the candidate open to the objections I've raised but my own preference and certainly if I was advising people coming in to work on a creative/critical PhD with me would be to focus on those questions of technique as somehow it's a way of constraining and confining the scope of the PhD and offers something that has an obvious bridge between the components.
4. But the problem there of course is 'Does that project constitute a substantial and original contribution to knowledge?' I'm not sure, so it's in that area that ... I'm not quite convinced.
5. It seems to me just the way in which we define what a PhD is, is the problem.

Question 18: What you would do [as a supervisor] if someone didn't have a strong critical background?

Ex1:

1. Ideally you would try to pick that up before they enter but assuming they are already in there one thing I would do is try and talk with them about whether there is a particular research methods course or content based course, depending on what their project is, that they could do.
2. If there weren't a course that I could suggest they take I would be getting them to do quite a structured critical bibliography type project with me so that they do a lot of reading of the kind of thing they're going to need to write and they do a lot of clear thinking about how these things they are reading relate to each other.

Question 19: What order of tasks do you suggest to students? (critical or creative first?)

SupEx:

1. I would try to follow the student's preference or determine if they had a preference and encourage them to pursue that.
2. If they didn't have a preference I'd probably encourage them to start with the critical because it would be easier to show how the creative had arisen or was related to the critical, rather than a retrospective kind of thing.
3. Some people do them in tandem so they kind of alternate so for one supervision session they'll be doing creative stuff. This is easier with poets than it is with prose I think, for example, a batch of poems for this session and let's have a draft of a chapter of the critical stuff that might relate to that.
4. The thing to bear in mind with this is that at the end of their first year or they have to produce a full [Research] Proposal so they actually have to show that they've done quite a bit of work by then.
5. So they are being sort of made to do them [critical and creative] concurrently now, in effect.
6. It could work if someone started with the creative but they'd have to know that one of the boxes they'd be expected to tick was to show that they had made some serious advance with the critical stuff within a year

Sup:

1. It turns out differently in practice each time depending on the vagaries of the critical and creative process but my sense of it is that if you really want your creative component to be informed by your critical component you'd better be putting in a good effort at defining the critical territory early on.
2. The creative component may be operating in tandem with the creative i.e. at times you might be doing both or you might have times when you feel like you need to knuckle down on the critical side to really find out what it is you think about certain things.
3. At the same time I feel like there needs to be room for flexibility on that if somebody is having a great burst of creative activity you don't want to stand in the way of the flow and say 'No No I'm going to block up that river at the moment because I think you ought to be doing this critical stuff over here'.
4. There's got to be some kind of regard for the way creative writing actually works in the sense that if things are running hot then you need to grab them while they're hot.
5. My own nature perhaps inclines me to emphasise getting the critical right a bit more strongly in that in some ways I see that as the more difficult part.
6. Let's figure out whether there are difficulties here that we need to address early on so in that sense I'm kind of always interested to get the critical side underway in that split component model anyway.
7. I don't think that students should be encouraged to regard the critical component as this hard thing I have to do alongside/after I've done the fun part which is the creative part. It may be that is how it has worked in some cases but I do think absolutely if we're going to assert that in some sense the PhD is one thing then it seems to me more likely to be one thing if there is significant critical build-up prior to or at least in tandem with the creative component.
8. The Research Proposal structure is already kind of pushing people to be sure that they've got that [critical] underpinning.
9. [Without that] On a completely human level it would be very easy to do the stuff you know how to do, the fun stuff, the creative stuff, and procrastinate about the critical.

Ex1:

1. What can happen in the first year is that all the focus goes on the critical and it's all discussed in terms of concept and not enough in kind of texture of the creative project – that discussion of the grand idea you're trying to do without actually looking at how it's working down there in the creative project.
2. I feel like there needs to be quite a vague intuitive sense pretty early on about how the two might work together but then I'm inclined to think that the creative needs to go on a bit further before the critical is decided.

3. I would still try to get the creative more upfront at the beginning in new projects but I think students, by the end of that [first] year need to be demonstrating some kind of mastery of whatever critical voice they're using.
4. Maybe you'd need to get them to stop working on the creative and then spend four months on the proposal.
5. The reason for doing that, for placing the emphasis like that, would be to allow the space for the creative work to drive the critical.

Question 20: Student experiences of working on the critical and creative components

Grad1:

1. The critical and the creative moved together at the same time. From day one I was writing both.
2. It had a lot to do with the fact that I was doing [other discipline] papers. I quickly realised that while all this new information was coming in I couldn't not write it creatively and then when I was writing creatively I found that I was moving in the direction of the critical work as well, for example, I might get taught something about force so I would write about that [in the creative] and then through writing about that I'd think 'Oh I wonder how [a certain group] talk about this force?' and then I would go back to the critical.
3. Right to the end I would sit with two word documents open. I would work on the critical and then I'd think 'Oh that reminds me!' and I'd go back to the creative and write something and in the creative I'd be like 'Oh that's interesting that I'm using that term in that way. Is there any evidence in the data for that?'
4. Sometimes I would work on the critical in the morning and the creative at night but generally I was flicking from one to the other.
5. Now when I look at the book there are certain chapters that are informed by certain parts of the critical and those were the chapters that I would have open. They were definitely working in real time.
6. When I started I thought because I went in there with no [other discipline] knowledge the critical would inform the creative but that wasn't the process.

Grad2:

1. I had a comparatively easy ride because I had that clear in my mind that I would be creatively reading first and then creatively writing.
2. I worked on the critical project for the first year and a little bit and then wrote the stories.

3. It always seemed fairly clear to all of us that that's the way they would appear in the thesis.

Question 21: Do Supervisors need a PhD?

(I did not ask this question. I should have. Ex2 raised it. Unfortunately this was the final interview)

Ex2: I suppose obviously the people employed teaching creative writing may be published novelists and poets but not themselves have a PhD in any discipline. Whether that becomes an issue in terms of particularly how the critical component is envisaged and supervised, that never occurred to me but yeah...

Question 22: Do you expect a student in a creative writing PhD to produce critical work that is at the same level as a PhD piece of work; smaller but at the same level of sophistication?

SupEx:

1. Neither of the components is quite one thing or the other. The creative is arguably not long enough to be a freestanding book and the critical, equally, is not developed enough. It's the length of an MA.
2. Quite often they will be examined by people who are themselves stronger on the critical side than they are on the creative and will be very concerned that the sophistication of a critical discussion is comparable with any other PhDs that they might examine or supervise in their own discipline.

Sup:

1. The easy answer is to do with size and scope. I think that we should perhaps be encouraging [examiners] to see it as the work has to stand up in terms of knowing the current thinking in that particular area of the discipline that the student is working in but we're not going to pretend that the writer is now an expert in structural engineering or jazz or whatever it is.
2. We need students to be demonstrating that they have a good understanding of the particular aspect of that discipline they are using to inform their creative work.
3. We're not expecting them to have done the full literature survey that you might expect from a specialist PhD discipline.
4. You want the person to be deploying their information in a plausible and well-informed fashion, whether in the critical or the creative component.

Ex1:

1. That's such a hard question isn't it?
2. It's that question of level, how we explain that.
3. I think that it probably *can't* be of the level and the wide reading nature of a critical PhD say in English but I do think it is VERY hard for an examiner not to expect that.
4. We haven't yet worked out a way of explaining that we don't expect it to be quite of that level.
5. Conceptually the thinking should be as good but the reading maybe is not as wide-ranging or the kind of reading as in a standard PhD.
6. One of the issues that we face is that there's a particular mode of literary critical writing which is very theoretically sophisticated and it's very hard to master and takes years and I think that if we're getting creative writing PhD students to try and mimic a small version of that, they're probably going to fall short. Their critical work is going to look like a very weak version of that.
7. I feel like I do want it to be at the same level but I think it can be different.
8. And that's why I think that if we can find ways to have the writerly approach and the writerly voice and the things that the student knows from being a writer which are different from being a literary critic. If that can find a place in the critical then it becomes a different project, as good but in a different mode.

Ex2:

1. In one PhD I examined the other examiner who was from [a second discipline] didn't really feel that the candidate had a PhD level grasp of [the second discipline] issues that were being addressed, which in some senses was fair enough because this wasn't a PhD in [the second discipline], whereas we both felt that the creative component was extremely successful as a work of fiction. So this was a situation in which there was potentially a kind of disparity in quality between the two areas of the thesis and a disparity that was, you could argue, intrinsic to the process.
2. You weren't going to get a candidate who had a PhD level grasp of [the second discipline]. It would be asking too much of the candidate in a sense, so from an examiner's point of view, I think we felt that there was a slight fudge involved that the main component of the thesis was extremely accomplished as far as we could judge and the critical component had very interesting things in it but the other examiner felt it hadn't come up to PhD standard on that front.
3. Whether that critical work was in the [second discipline] is a moot point. It was probably in the discipline of literature and literary study, which is why, to my mind, the kind of technical approach of the PhD about XX's short stories worked very well. In a sense both components of the PhD were coming from the same discipline.
4. I think if you're going to have the stipulation that a creative writing PhD addresses a research question, a potential pitfall that's going to arise [is] that it's unrealistic to

expect candidates to have a kind of PhD level grasp of the secondary literature in the research question that they're addressing, if the main component of their PhD is to address it through a work of fiction.

5. I suppose that leaves the question of what is the research question that is being addressed in that PhD. I'm not sure there was one.

Grad2:

1. I have this tension between wanting that writing pragmatic focus and the sense that all that matters is that the writing that's generated is good, versus an older idea or a sort of sense that it's a higher degree, it's a PhD and therefore the critical component and the overall artefact, as presented, needs to be functioning at that level to meet the needs of that kind of degree in other parts of the academy.
2. On balance I know that I'd come down on the side that the PhD degree is a pragmatically oriented one and the most important thing is that better writing is generated by people going through this degree.
3. On balance I would [also] come down on the side of 'flexibility is good' and the critical project needs to be open and adaptable to meet the needs of writers.

Question 23: How do the criteria for examining a PhD fit with a creative writing PhD?

Ex2:

1. My experience of examining and supervising these things is fairly limited but one of the things that did strike me in the IIML case was that the criteria by which the university defines what a PhD is ... in the nature of things these criteria have to be generic, but they don't to my mind map particularly well onto the kinds of strengths that you want to see in a work of fiction.
2. It seemed to me that an element of fudge was required to apply these criteria to a piece of creative writing, and also a kind of reductive element. A piece of creative writing is not really a coherent report and marshalling of evidence. That can be involved but it's not really looking at something for what it is, in my view, if you're applying these criteria.
3. I don't know where we go from there because you're not going to have the university re-defining what a PhD is for one discipline.
4. Are we engaged in a subterfuge here presenting this as a PhD when it doesn't really fulfil the criteria?
5. A good novel will always be a substantial and original contribution to knowledge but kind of not the way the framers of these criteria had in mind.

Question 24: How important do you think it is for examiners to be able to comment on both the critical and creative parts of the work?

SupEx:

1. Very important. Otherwise you're in effect having one examiner say 'I don't know anything about that part of it but this part is very good' and the other saying 'Oh but this bit is terrific but I don't really know about that part'.
2. You would certainly want one at least of the examiners to be a practitioner, a sort of accepted practitioner.

Sup:

1. For a lot of our PhDs that's too big an ask when you are looking at people who are working in such disparate fields. There aren't that many individuals in the world who combine the creative writing analysis skills with the technical skills of a particular discipline.
2. In practise you try and get a spread of expertise between the three examiners. And given that that is the way it is, the framing of it to examiners becomes quite important.
3. I do think it does pose some difficulties in finding examiners in some cases who feel comfortable and at ease with both aspects of the work even if they're being asked to be there as the specialist on the other side of the table from the writing side.

Question 25: Do you think that PhDs in creative writing are actually examined as a whole entity or are they examined as out of a forty and a sixty percent?

SupEx:

1. I do think that the two bits get assessed almost as discrete entities.
2. One of the things that you're trying to do as a supervisor is encourage the student to find ways in which they can try and make these two entities seem more integrated.
3. Sometimes there'll be a bridging section, which will try to show how studying the discourse of X helps you to produce Y.

Ex1:

1. From examining them, I've become very aware that when you are an examiner you read them as a whole. Or that's my experience.

2. Ideally there's a sort of idea, a project, whether you want to say that's the research question I'm not quite sure, but there's a project that's being explored in a couple of ways.
3. The question of how to present it is one I've really struggled with with my students because I've seen in the examinations I've been involved with just how much weight gets put on the critical and so much of the writing and the sense is focussed on the critical and the critical can be used as a slightly blunt apparatus at times for analysing the creative.
4. So one thing I've started to think is that when a PhD goes out, it goes out as a kind of art work in itself and that it's good to put the creative [project] up front.
5. I think if we have the critical up front we say 'This is all the thinking and then here's the creative [project] which is the example' and it seems to me to make the creative follow the critical as opposed to 'Here's a creative project and here's some of the ways it was created which is the secondary thing'.
6. When I'm examining actually I always try and read the creative first and then I read the critical and then I read the creative again.
7. This is intuitive. Just my sense that the creative should be able to be speaking on its own terms if it's successful and I wanted to read it and, as a reader, think about what it's doing and then I want to know that the student has been doing some interesting thinking and is aware of the conversation they're involved with and I quite like it when they're talking about their own project in the critical and then I think it's quite interesting to go back and say 'OK as a way of talking about how useful is the critical? If we look back and forth are there interesting things that one can talk about?'
8. If we keep sending the signal that the critical is the important thing our students will have issues because their critical will in some way be weird or lacking – in some cases it won't be but quite often it will be odd and I kind of feel we should believe in the creative work.

Question 26: Does the whole allow you to offset the merits of one component against the other?

Ex2:

1. I suppose that's the way I was approaching it. I suppose that [in one project] where there was a disparity in terms of quality between the two, it seemed to me that the creative component was the main component, not just in size but in terms of importance to the PhD and that to some extent the critical component was a kind of secondary ancillary element that was primarily there to contextualise, explicate, comment or throw light on the creative component, which does raise the issue of if

the creative component is excellent as was in this case can it drag the ... can it compensate for the shortcomings of the critical component?

2. The main component so clearly to our minds fulfilled the criteria of being a successful work of fiction. The case, certainly as far as the other examiner was concerned, was that the main component of the thesis was extremely accomplished whereas the critical component had ... If a PhD had to stand or fall on the critical component alone it would probably have fallen.

Reflections

There are common threads between these six individuals and strong echoes of findings from Australian and United Kingdom research. For example, among these examiners, as in the Australian literature, a tension exists between a desire to support creative approaches to the critical component and a desire to support a doctoral standard of work and there is an acknowledgement that there is no easily expressed or recognised standard for the critical component of the PhD in creative writing .

The desire for discipline-specific guidelines for examiners as well as the generic guidelines to examiners, mentioned by Sup in Question 9, also echoes other research.

There was a strong voice among participants in this study for the legitimacy of creative forms of critical writing. Participants also saw the work students are doing, or might wish to do, in the critical component, as linked to the development of creative writing's critical discourse. The energy and interest around this topic was significant.

Several times during the interviews participants gave contemporary and historical examples of critical discourse in creative writing from outside the academy. They also talked about the desirability of the critical work being 'part of the pleasure' of a thesis (Ex1 Question 5) and of their support for critical writing that appeals to more than an academic audience (Sup Question 6).

Among the challenges raised by supervisors in this study were the significance of recruiting suitable examiners, the demands of supervising very diverse projects and of providing supervision for students with extremely diverse backgrounds.

For the two graduates, the decision about the form of the critical component and its connection to the creative component was of major significance.

The supervisors and examiners willingly offered suggestions that could help students. For example Ex1 and Ex2 both spoke about how students could think about the scope of the project and how they could present their thesis to show the link between the components.

These suggestions made me think that soliciting suggestions and advice for current and prospective students from a wider range of supervisors, examiners and graduates would be a simple and fruitful area for further research.

There was no difficulty recruiting participants either from university staff or from graduates. The tone of the interviews was collegial and participants seemed to speak freely. During the interviews I had the clear impression that participants saw the present situation as developing, rather than completed. In that context research like this study was seen as helpful.

Grad2, for example, volunteered this statement at the end of the interview:

I can imagine that if, early on in the project, and in that early stage when you are trying to conceive of it, perhaps before you've even applied, people could get an idea of what the degree can look like in its most diverse kind of kaleidoscope then that's healthy.

Sup expressed a similar sentiment:

Access to information about how their predecessors have worked things through, the permanent products of the community as it were, is a useful thing on the very practical level as well as the more nebulous conceptual level.

These comments support the idea that finding ways to make thinking and experience explicit could be useful to people in various roles related to the PhD.

Ex2 expressed some doubt about whether critical work that investigated craft based aspects of literary works in order to apply those in the creative component, could constitute a legitimate research question.

The term 'research question' was used by me and subsequently by everyone in the study. When I thought about what people said about this, I wondered whether the term 'research question' was being used by all the participants to mean the same thing. I thought that a 'hard' and a 'soft' version of the term might be emerging, with Sup using the term to mean a unifying focus while comments by Ex2 (Question12) suggested that a more abstract or more specific meaning was being used. Ex2 also expressed concern at thinking of a novel as answering a research question. If others are also aware of shades of meaning or a looseness in the use of the term, it could be useful to open a discussion about what constitutes a research question in the IIML PhD and how research questions are being used.

In the interviews I asked supervisors whether working on the critical or creative components first worked best (Question 19) and asked graduates how they had worked on their own projects. All participants were conscious of the need for the critical component to be well

defined by the end of year one, in order for students to complete the formal Research Proposal. With this as a given, there was a range of practices for year one.

Grad2 completed the critical component first to learn specific things needed for the creative work, whereas Grad1 completed a version of the critical component for the Research Proposal, but continued to work on it concurrently with the creative work.

It is interesting that while there was some agreement that the critical component should serve the needs of the creative, there were different ideas about how that was best achieved. For example, Ex1 thought some initial work on the creative component would focus the critical so that it assisted the creative component but Grad2 thought a craft-focused critical component, written first, had supported the creative component well in their thesis.

Sup was in favour of the student doing substantial early work on the critical component, at least partly to see whether the student was likely to have problems with this work, and to make sure the critical component was not deferred by students who preferred to work on the creative component. SupEx saw some potential to follow the student's preference, while remaining mindful of the Research Proposal as an end of one year deadline.

The unifying idea here was a general recognition that each person's PhD project and specifically the critical/creative nexus, needed to develop its own character and rationale.

Another difference of opinion was in relation to the merits of having a critical component in the creative writing PhD. SupEx advocated that the degree be re-structured to remove the requirement for a critical component, because, since both components were limited in size, there would almost always be a problem over quality. Ex2, by contrast, described the critical component as helpful in that it could be graded. Ex2 also expressed significant doubts about the application of generic PhD assessment criteria to the creative writing PhD theses.

As far as I am aware, with the exception of hybrid theses published as books, no IIML PhD students have published books or monographs based on their critical component, although some students have given conference papers based on aspects of their critical work. By contrast, the proportion of PhD graduates who publish work based on the creative component is high.

Given the support for 'writerly' critical work from most of the participants, there does seem to be a possibility of exciting published critical work from IIML PhD theses in the future.

Interestingly, two of the three examiners referred directly to their own creative practice as informing their views on the role of the critical component and its nature. In both cases this thinking was connected to more exploratory views of what might be possible in critical work. Clearly examiners who are also creative writing practitioners are an asset to the process.

One of the most surprising findings in this study was how few of the questions raised in Text's Special Issue 3, 'Illuminating the Exegesis', published in 2004, have been resolved in respect of the IIML PhD. For example, Fletcher and Mann's statement in their Introduction to the Special Issue that despite the creative product plus exegesis degrees being well established in university policy, uncertainty 'is often most evident among HDR (Research Higher Degree in creative disciplines) candidates and their supervisors, manifesting, in particular, as a lack of clarity regarding the nature, role and expectations of the exegesis component of this thesis model', matched the experiences reported in this study, ten years later and in a different country.

Since about 2008, the Australian research has been moving on from these statements of problems to calls for training of examiners and creating guidelines for examiners of creative arts PhDs. Clearly it would be useful for IIML to be aware of these directions, and potentially become part of the research community that is discussing issues and developing resources.

Having been privileged to speak with the six research participants and consider their views, I have wondered whether, rather than describing the 'lack of clarity' about the critical component as a pedagogical problem, the critical/creative nexus in the IIML PhD could better be described as requiring a 'conscious juggling' of many factors. Because of this complexity, many outcomes are possible in terms of the nature of both creative and critical projects with consequent creative benefits for students. Grad1 talks about this in response to Question 22 and Grad2 in response to Question 15. This openness is seen by them as a valuable and important thing, something worth a bit of stress and worth protecting.

From this perspective the most significant idea that I would take from the interviews is that a student's capacity to *orchestrate* options *consciously* (such as how the topic is defined, how the critical and creative ideas connect and how the thesis is presented) is a key resource for safely traversing the territory of the PhD. Extending that a step further, the pedagogical question would be how best to resource this juggling. The notion of 'learner agency' appeared in my mind as I thought about this.

'Learner agency' is a very 'hot' topic in education generally at the moment. Increasing 'learner agency' promotes learning that is embedded in a student's own culture and priorities. I note with interest that all the activities and approaches suggested in the interviews allow for individual interests and skills.

Participants in this study offered several practical methods for developing that conscious orchestration or juggling capacity through supervision. They describe these in their own terms. I would go a step further towards pedagogical discourse and suggest that 'learner agency', or a socially mediated, considered form of confidence, is the meta-cognitive dimension around which these practical methods coalesce.

Taking a very wide view, I found myself wondering why the generic features of any quality learning environment, such as the goal of facilitating increased learner agency, or to put it another way, facilitating students to learn how to learn, would not apply to the PhD process as much as it does to Year One of school? There have always been a small number of PhD students who lose direction or confidence to the point where they lose momentum in their project. If that is one end of the continuum of learner agency, I would like to see what people are doing at the other end.

During the time I have been working on this project two very senior figures in the academic creative writing network have said in conversation that it is important to remember that the low 'failure' rate of PhDs means that the real risk that students face is small. Both mentioned that examiners want the best for students and generally take a constructive approach to the examination process.

In our final discussion of this paper Damien Wilkins, Director of IIML and coordinator of the PhD programme, commented that in his experience the generic PhD assessment criteria are not as rigid a constraint in practice as they appear. The final assessment works itself out in the examination room, he said. Even after reports have been written, the oral examination is another opportunity in which examiners can negotiate to reach the final outcome. A flavour of this comes through in the interviews in this study.

These general factors would be somewhat reassuring for students to know about.

In terms of general advice, keeping the scope well defined, paying attention to the framing of the critical component and the connections between the two parts in the final thesis and the selection of the most suitable examiners were mentioned by examiners in this study.

In an informal presentation at Victoria University on the first of February 2017, Professor Jen Webb talked about slightly different strategies for success in a PhD such as not trying to do everything, choosing the methodology to fit the project goals, not making shallow or unnecessary use of fashionable theorists and writing clearly.

The relative newness of the IIML PhD meant that in December 2014 the total number of IIML theses that Sup, SupEx, Ex1 and Ex2 had direct dealings with was small. From a pedagogical point of view the body of completed PhDs is like case law. Completing this project, finding the idea of 'conscious orchestration', hearing the constructive engagement of participants and the practical suggestions participants made, has given me an optimistic view of what is available to help students with the challenges posed by critical/creative nexus.

All of that notwithstanding, it still concerns me that individuals involved in the PhD, including but not limited to students, may not know much about how that body of precedent is developing outside of their own direct experience unless someone makes a deliberate choice to make that known.

I am hopeful that the practical and conceptual suggestions offered by these six people and future research which could collect more advice and suggestions for students on how to manage their own PhD projects in creative writing could play a very positive part in helping students to juggle the factors identified in these interviews. I would like to thank IIML and the participants for their willingness to share in this exercise. Personally I would like to hear more 'advice and guidance' from participants in this degree.

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