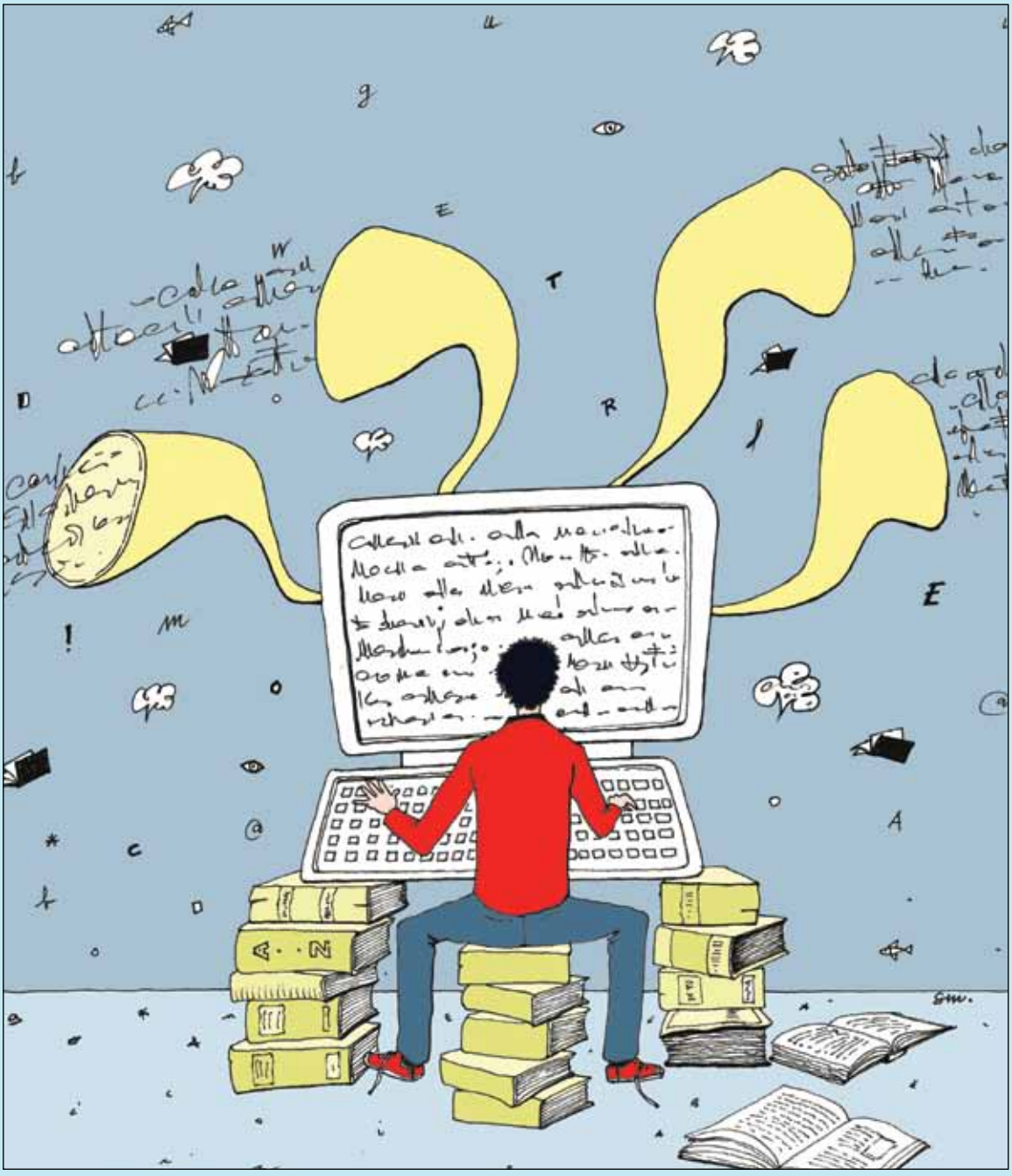
THE HANDBOOK OF CREATIVE WRITING

2nd Edition



Edited by Steven Earnshaw

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Preface to Second Edition

After *The Handbook* was first published I presumed my role in it, other than a brief flurry of publicity at the start, was ended, and I was content with the idea that nothing more could be added to improve the book, because advice on how to write well was good for a very long time, if not forever. However, in the intervening period there have been significant changes in the world of publishing and social media which affect the world of the writer, and at least two new genres have been spotted. In addition, some people quite rightly felt that there were gaps in the original book. This Second Edition has therefore taken stock of a new world and new genres, and remedied previous omissions.

The Craft section has been augmented with chapters on 'Song Lyrics', 'Creative–Critical Hybrids', 'Flash Fiction' and 'Collaboration'. Pat Pattison's 'Song Lyrics and Poetry' takes the reader through a rigorous critique of the popular assertion that a 'lyric' is the same entity as a 'poem'. 'Really?' he responds, and takes off from there, pursuing the profound differences in musicality, rhythm, sound versus sight, and density of meaning. Hazel Smith is one of the foremost commentators and exponents of creative–critical hybrid writing, a genre which fuses two types of writing traditionally regarded as distinct, and she explains the theory and practice of such fusion before setting out exercises for the aspiring hybridist to attempt. Tony Williams grapples with another 'new' genre – 'flash fiction' – a genre that is not just 'shorter short stories', but a prose offering which has its own particular demands and outlets. Here is a chance to extend your repertoire, he urges, with the added benefit that it may improve your longer narratives. Timothy Braun elaborates on the role that collaboration has in theatre for the playwright, the kinds of negotiation that such a process demands, and provides guidelines for keeping your voice in an environment where you will always at some point have to hand your work over to others.

The most noticeable sea-change has been the expansion of digital media into social networks and the world of publishing. Two new chapters cover the possibilities and pitfalls: Jane Rowland looks at 'Self-Publishing and the Rise of the Indie Author', and shows just how 'liberating' self-publishing can be for writers; Lou Treleaven illuminates the ways in which you can 'Meet Your Public' through the (careful) embrace of social media, demonstrating how 'a creative use of social networking can turn the general public into your public'. These chapters are, of course, complementary, since they both register the idea that modern writers are expected to closely engage in the promotion of themselves and their writing. I suggest reading these alongside Alison Baverstock's updated chapter

on 'How to Present Yourself as a Writer', a clear, thorough and direct guide to the kind of self-awareness and professionalism writers are best advised to adopt when dealing with the contemporary publishing world. James Sheard's 'Writing for the Web', there in the First Edition, has been updated to take into account those aspects of writing which belong specifically to the virtual ether. The legal side of author's rights and publishing regulations is brought up to the present in the chapter on 'Copyright' (Shay Humphrey, with Lee Penhaligan), including predictions of what may happen in the future.

While the business end of writing may be the most noticeable aspect of the author's life to have been affected, students of writing will be receiving tuition which likewise makes the most of the new technology, and the first chapter, 'Theories of Creativity and Creative Writing Pedagogy' (Anna Leahy, Mary Cantrell and Mary Swander), updated for this edition, incorporates fresh observations in this area, as well as reflecting on some of the other changes already noted.

In the final chapter, 'Making a Living as a Writer', Livi Michael observes that writers are increasingly pulled in opposing directions, one where there is greater opportunity for getting the writing out there, the other a greater difficulty in making a living solely out of writing. At the heart of Livi's chapter – and the book as a whole – is the belief that good writing in all its manifestations matters, and that being a writer – being dedicated to writing – matters. This continues to be the spirit of *The Handbook*.

Introduction

Steven Earnshaw

As a handbook this guide is intended not just to help and inform, but also to provoke and inspire. The contributors are professionals within their fields of expertise and apart from being asked to cover the necessary topic have been free to deal with their subject how they see fit – there has been no attempt to produce regulation and uniform chapters. The book is aimed primarily at the student embarking on a creative writing programme in Higher Education, with many of the writers here also teaching on creative writing MAs or MFAs, and to that end many of the chapters reflect the different teaching styles on offer. This book, therefore, is also intended for tutors. The aim throughout has been to have within the pages of a single book all that you might need as a writer or tutor to further your writing and teaching, and to further your writing career. It explores a number of different contexts within which the student-writer and teacher of creative writing work: literary tradition and genre, the postgraduate degree, the academy, literary culture, literary theory, the world of publishing and production, the world of being a writer and writing.

How to read this book

I don't for a second imagine that anybody will read this book from cover to cover; it is not that type of book. Rather, it is the virtue of a handbook that readers can jump immediately to what they need to know: I want to write a novel (Rogers); teach creative writing in the community (Sargent); introduce literary theory into my workshops (Ramey); publish poetry (Twichell; O'Brien); get an agent (Smith; Friedmann; Brodie), choose a degree (Newman; Vanderslice) and so on. Conversely, if you have no interest in cultural, academic or theoretical contexts you will quickly see that you should avoid Section One, and if you have no interest in knowing how to get your writing out into the 'real' world and make a splash as a writer, you will turn a blind eye to Section Three (although I gather that this is rather unlikely). But if you were, indeed, to be the 'ideal reader' and read the book from one end to the other, you might make a number of surprising connections.

For instance, Brian Kiteley's 'Reading and Writing Historical Fiction' and David Rain's 'Literary Genres' include digressions into different aspects of the history of the novel, and might be read in conjunction with Jane Rogers's 'Introduction to the Novel'. Aaron Kunin's 'New Poetries' is packed full of references to experiments with writing and concepts and takes the reader well beyond the realms of poetry. It could be read alongside

Thalia Field's chapter on 'Experimental Writing', after which there would be the surprise of a different kind of experimental writing to be found in Linda Sargent's 'Writing in the Community'. You certainly might expect to find mention of the experimental French group of writers known as Oulipo in 'New Poetries', but you will also find an Oulipo exercise in the chapter on historical fiction. Both Alan Brown's 'Writing for Children' and Linda Newbery's 'Writing for Teenagers' might open your eyes to ways of thinking about writing which draw on creative processes you might not otherwise encounter, even if you only intend to write for 'grown-ups'. The chapter on 'Writing as "Therapy"' might be a long way down the list of chapters to read if your first interest is 'Form in Poetry', but in Fiona Sampson's piece you will find a section on how text affects audience, spurred on by the poet John Kinsella, and discussing Keats, Kathleen Jamie, Celan, Pound, Eliot, amongst others, along the way. In passing you would note that there are some common reference points: Aristotle's *Poetics* recurs time and again; T. S. Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' is surprisingly popular, and William Goldman's dictum, 'get in late, get out early' is commandeered by novel, short story and script.

Also remember that many of the contributors are both writers and teachers. All the pieces have a great enthusiasm. You have only to read Lauri Ramey's piece on 'Creative Writing and Critical Theory' to know that to be involved in her class would treat you to a full-on immersion in both criticism and creativity, alongside the broadest of historical sweeps, and would instil a sense of just how exciting and potent these activities can be for your own writing. And Gareth Creer's plea for the teaching of writing as something that is much, much more than a means of supplementing an income that is always widely variable shows that creative writing teaching, in and out of the academy, can be a necessary part of the writer's *writing* life. You will frequently encounter ideas you will want to introduce into your own practice.

The different approaches offer different models of teaching and reflect the success, or otherwise, of different kinds of writing within contemporary culture. Lee Gutkind's chapter is a replication of teaching 'creative nonfiction' via seminars and workshops, as is E. A. Markham's chapter on the short story. Sean O'Brien's 'Introduction to Poetry' gives practical advice on the use of a workshop, and what should constitute a good one. Some chapters stand as polemic and some as defences for types of writing regarded as 'lesser' in the context of creative writing (for example, Susan Bassnett's chapter on 'Translation' and also James Sheard's 'Writing for the Web'), or little considered ('Writing for Radio' in Mike Harris's chapter, and also in Alan Brodie's 'The Literary Agent: Television, Radio and Theatre'). Sean O'Brien's attack on the dominance of prose over poetry in his essay on 'Verse Drama' has a corollary in Susan Bassnett's note on the 1940s Penguin Classics translations of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* into prose form rather than a poetic equivalent. O'Brien's chapter highlights verse drama's current near-invisibility and decline and amounts to a virtual 'recovery' of its possibilities and models. Similarly, George Szirtes' chapter champions other poetic art forms that struggle for a good hearing, the long poem and the sequence, and Alan Brodie makes a heartfelt plea for Radio Drama as the purest medium for the scriptwriter. But a book such as this also gives you the opportunity to think about trying out writing you might not normally have considered. Judith Barrington's chapter on 'Writing the Memoir' begins by dispelling the belief that it is a form available only to 'the famous'. Any prose writer would benefit from this chapter as it works through the shaping of narrative. I hope that one of the joys of this book is that, in addition to its primary functions, it has chapters that will reward those curious about all aspects of literary culture and writing.

The book also includes insights into areas of writing and writing contexts that will hopefully be new or unusual. For instance, a continuing assumption by some is that the activities of literary criticism and creative writing make unhappy bedfellows within the academy, with criticism the established forum for literature and creative writing an unwelcome johnny-come-lately. Lauri Ramey's chapter here not only demonstrates the shared heritage for both but the ways in which critical studies from Longinus onwards can be used to engage with creativity, the role of the writer and writing. Similarly, thinking about 'genre' may not immediately spring to mind as a way in to creativity, but its importance is here shown in David Rain's chapter as another feature of contemporary literary culture which has its roots in the Classical age and which can inform the practice of writing and our reflection upon it. But genre isn't just about what we are writing, it is about how we are reading and what we are expecting when we do pick up a poem or novel, or sit down to watch a film or play. And, with the history of the novel as a model, Rain shows how new genres and new literature come into being. Genre is one of the broadest contexts within which a writer can work, yet the student writer is rarely called upon to explore it unless perhaps asked to define the difference between 'literary' and 'genre' fiction (also discussed in Rain's chapter; and you will find an exercise to understand genre in Mike Harris's 'Introduction to Scriptwriting' and discussion of 'genre' in 'Science Fiction and Fantasy' by Crawford Kilian and 'Writing Crime Fiction' by John Dale). Exploration of genre inevitably takes us into questions of originality and levels of artistic ambition (also addressed by Lauri Ramey in the context of literary criticism, and in my chapter on 'The Role of the Artist'), what kind of writing 'enables' others to write, and what can only be admired as one-off performances. Thus Rain asserts: 'Genre is the most important decision a writer makes'. It is a rare starting point for creative writing, but a fruitful one.

As Swander, Leahy and Cantrell point out in their chapter on 'Theories of Creativity and Creative Writing Pedagogy', creative writing within the academy has had a rather difficult time compared to other arts. Artists and composers predated the arrival of writers into academe, where it was not until the 1920s that writing started to lay down roots at the University of Iowa, the institution usually credited with being the first university to embrace creative writing. Elsewhere in the chapter the authors note that the writing programme there has to good effect been underpinned by the Romantic myth that writers are born, not created in the workshop, and that the academy can at best provide an environment for talent to develop. Nevertheless, the danger of this approach for the academy is clear: 'To state openly and confidently that creative writing cannot be taught, however, puts the field at risk as a serious *academic* pursuit'. Its staple method of teaching, the workshop, is 'non-traditional', and, it is often argued, creative writing cannot be assessed and evaluated in the same manner as other academic subjects. At the same time as creative writing is firmly within the academy in the US, the UK and elsewhere, some of these issues remain (see Jenny Newman's essay on 'Evaluation and Assessment'). The tension is not always generated by the literary critics either: it is not unusual for writers themselves to have mixed feelings about their place within the academy, especially those who have not gone through a creative writing programme. The growth of creative writing within the academy, its emphasis on process rather than product through the workshop event and its ways of assessment, has meant that it has developed what Swander, Leahy and Cantrell here identify as a 'signature pedagogy': a way of teaching, learning and assessment specific to creative writing. As Paul Dawson points out, creative writing programmes cannot just claim to be about the passing down of craft, since they 'exist in an intellectual environment of interdisciplinarity, critical

self-reflection and oppositional politics on the one hand, and in an institutional environment of learning outcomes, transferable skills and competitive research funding on the other' ('The Future of Creative Writing'). In America, creative writing has often been seen in opposition to theory, whereas in Australia and the UK it emerged in the last two decades alongside theory to challenge what was regarded as a literary studies *status quo*. Dawson warns that to continue to begin discussions with the opposition between literary theory and creative writing will lead to a stasis. After all, he claims, Creative Writing in the academy is hardly a subject in crisis; instead it flourishes in a 'post-theory' environment. To nail an old problem in relation to creative writing in academia, he states: 'If the question which once dominated discussions of Creative Writing was, "Can or should writing be taught?", it is now, "*What* should we be teaching students?"' This book shows just what is being taught, and also, I think, what might be taught.

The one thing needful: reading

What may come as a surprise to some is that time and again authors in this book recommend reading first and foremost. I remember a student presenting to the class a scene from a novel he was working on which concerned two children on holiday. One of the children becomes trapped as the sea is coming in while the other looks on helplessly, and the description of the drowning was cool and unnerving, capped by a very affecting finale. The writer later told me that some of his fellow students would ask him how he had achieved such an accomplished piece of writing, such an effect. This puzzled (and annoyed) him: you simply read how others did it and moved on from there. How else would you go about it? It was obvious.

The fact that this was something of a revelation to other students no doubt gives some credence to the charge from tutors that students don't read enough, and John Milne in 'How to be a Writer' couldn't state it more clearly: 'To write you need to read'. Tutors will also say that the best readers make the best writers. This book is full of references to other works of literature, film, and criticism, and thus gives a generous and exciting reading list. It is not uncommon for courses to begin by asking each student to suggest one or two books that everybody might read, and in that way create a common fund of reading which is specific to that group. E. A. Markham's chapter here begins by setting out what he expects the student to read if he or she is to grasp the complexities of the short story form and gain an understanding of its history; Brighde Mullins' piece on writing for theatre advises: 'It is important that you are able to locate the sources of your connection to the theatre, and to read and see as many plays as you can before you start writing for the stage'; and Susan Hubbard writes 'There's no better way to learn to write humour than to read it'. John Milne gives a host of other reasons why reading will help you as a writer, and Mary Mount puts it just as clearly from the editor's point of view: '*Do* read, read, read'. Being a better writer is also about becoming a better reader, as John Dale says: 'Reading good fiction is not passive like watching bad TV, it requires engagement, concentration to enter the fictional world'.

Writing and re-writing

Authors have also been generous in giving away their exercises. In his essay on 'Form' in poetry, W. N. Herbert remarks: 'In the same way as a musician or dancer must repeat an action enough times for the neural pathways to be established, for the body to learn

what is required of it, so too rhythmic awareness needs time to accommodate itself to verbal dexterity'. The same could be said of writing in general – the necessity to keep on writing is rather like exercises in other art forms. I had one tutor who used to start each workshop with a writing task as a means of 'warming up'. Although I am used to this when playing a musical instrument, it never occurred to me that you would do the same for writing, since, no doubt like many others on the course, I always thought that writing 'just happened' – more or less – if you wanted it to happen. You will see throughout this book exercises for you to try out, for easing into writing, or as a means of getting out of a writing rut. The poet Ian Duhig once gave a Masterclass at which he read a number of poems that had started out as exercises. He noted that other poets were often quite sniffy about such pieces, but couldn't see how the objection could be sustained when it produced such results: hang on to your exercises.

I have already intimated that there may be a belief that writing just 'happens', that writers are simply inspired one way or another and that's the end of it. Such a view does have the tendency to elide the graft that is everywhere evident and necessary. Bonnie O'Neill in her chapter on 'Writing for Film' declares: 'Re-write, re-write, re-write', and E. A. Markham *begins* with revision. Any practising writer will tell you that re-writing or redrafting is the hardest thing. After all, inspiration is easy: you just have to be there. John Dale serves up the following advice: 'Thomas Mann said that a writer is somebody for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people. And it's true. Good writing is hard work and looks easy. It has energy yet never appears rushed'. So just as you will be urged to read, you will be urged to re-write, to revise, to redraft. Be your 'inner editor', as Crawford Kilian puts it.

The Masters experience

There's nothing quite like taking a creative-writing postgraduate degree, nor, for that matter, teaching on one. Here is an absolute community of writers whose whole activity is to talk about writing, share writing, and see how it might be improved. Although degrees may be structured differently from country to country, the sense of excitement, ambition and challenge is familiar across countries and continents (for comparisons of degree structures see Jenny Newman's chapter [UK] and Stephanie Vanderslice's [US], and look at Graeme Harper's, which compares different formats for creative-writing higher degrees in the US, UK, Australia and Canada). A number of the chapters touch on the tension that creative writing within the academy creates and undergoes, including modules where creative-writing students are expected to engage with academic, theoretical and critical work (Lauri Ramey; Scott McCracken). As McCracken notes: 'Ideas such as the "death of the author", which can seem fresh and exciting in a third year undergraduate seminar on a traditional English degree, can appear absurd in a room full of struggling novelists; and their derision is hardly likely to be contradicted by a creative writing tutor who writes to live'. Nevertheless, the experience of doing a creative-writing Masters is something quite unique, as Sean O'Brien states in his 'Introduction to Poetry': 'The poet studying on a Writing course should feel free – no, should feel obliged – to be imaginatively and intellectually gluttonous. You may never have a better opportunity. Enjoy it!' The input from tutors and other writers is a constant incentive to read more and to improve your writing. It is very difficult to discover the same week-by-week intensity and sense of belonging to the writing community outside of this environment, and it can take some students a while to adjust to

the essentially 'lonely' occupation that writing is once the class has been left behind, although it is not unusual for a group to continue to meet after formal sessions have ended. I have even seen one group which rotated the 'role of tutor' so that it replicated the workshop situation the students had been used to. As Jenny Newman points out, you should make the most of all the feedback that you get while it is there. It is not so easy to come by once the degree is over.

The writer's life

For most students (not all), one of the reasons for taking a creative-writing Masters is that it is a route to publication. Not only will you be improving your writing and be immersed in a hot-bed of intellectual endeavour, you will expect to see a procession of famous writers, top agents and classy publishers throw themselves at your feet. Undoubtedly MA/MFA programmes are important in giving the opportunities for student-writers to come into contact with the 'business end' of writing. One of the advantages of such contacts is that the world of publishing and production and agenting is seen to consist of people who have as much interest in providing good literature as you have. Agents often get a bad press, somehow stuck in the middle between publishers and writers, harder to get than a publisher if you're not already known and simply creaming off unearned percentages of those who probably don't need an agent. The chapters on publishers and agents in this book should deliver quite a different message, with both practical advice and a wider sense of the contexts within which they are working.

Equally, if you are looking at what life as a writer might be, you will no doubt be drawn to John Milne's 'How to be a Writer', Livi Michael's 'Making a Living as a Writer' and Tom Shapcott's chapter on 'Literary Life: Prizes, Anthologies, Festivals, Reviewing, Grants'. In addition, you should look at Gareth Creer's 'The Writer as Teacher', which shows the benefits of expanding your repertoire as writer and teacher, and the mutually beneficial rewards of both activities. The latter piece also takes in life as a student of creative writing, and in Sean O'Brien's 'Introduction to Poetry' you will find advice on the pressures of combining a commitment to writing with life elsewhere. The word here is 'vocation', and although aimed specifically at poets it could be taken as referring to all those serious about writing. Mary Mount's 'The World of Publishing' will give you insights into how the world looks like from that end of fiction, and Alison Baverstock's 'How to Get Published' will give you a measure of how professional you need to be beyond the writing (as will Livi Michael's chapter). Students often believe that things will take care of themselves based on the merit of their writing, but as all these pieces will indicate, this is very far from the truth, even for those writers who gain a relatively easy path to publishing. Writers require robustness and a thick skin. Mary Mount warns: '*Don't* expect fame and money! There are easier and quicker ways to get rich and famous', and Sean O'Brien suggests that anyone wanting to be a poet who expects to make money is either a fool or a charlatan. 'Don't despair!' is thus another theme running through the book. Writing is hard work, and sometimes the writing has to be its own reward: 'Most published writers have experienced the torturous path that got us to where we wanted to be . . . And what probably kept us motivated throughout this was our sense of ourselves as writers' (Alison Baverstock); or John Dale: 'Above all, a writer needs persistence'. But of course some writers have 'excess' energy, a desire to be active in the culture of writing and publication beyond their own immediate writing: for

these I would suggest taking a look at Rebecca Wolff's chapter 'How to Start a Literary Magazine' (a chapter which includes a fair amount of advice on being an editor, and through which I winced in agreement).

National differences

The contributors to this book come from the UK, America, Canada and Australia, and naturally are drawn to examples from the cultures they are more familiar with, although when it comes to literary references these show an international understanding. On a couple of occasions it was felt that the differences warranted separate chapters: the systems of evaluation (if not necessarily delivery) of creative-writing Masters in the UK and America are quite different, and publishing poetry in the UK and publishing in the US are treated separately. There are also differences in relation to the creative-writing PhD, but these are dealt with specifically in Graeme Harper's essay on that topic, and the reader will also find useful comments on Masters and Doctoral degrees across all four countries in Paul Dawson's chapter. The chapter on 'Copyright' takes into account copyright law in all four countries mentioned. Stephen V. Duncan's chapter on 'Writing for Television' is geared towards the American system, but most of the points made apply equally to such writing elsewhere, and any writer would always be advised to research the policies of television companies and agents in their own country before attempting approaches, even if not specifically covered in this part. The differences between the UK and US are dealt with in John Milne's following piece, written as a complement to Duncan's. Fiona Sampson's chapter on 'Writing as "Therapy"' and Linda Sargent's on 'Writing in the Community' are drawn very much from local experience, as you might expect, but have general application, both theoretically and practically.

Enjoy the book

These chapters open up worlds of writing and worlds of imagination, ways of thinking about form, structure, plot, language, character, genre, creativity, reading, teaching, audience . . . and being a writer. I hope you enjoy it.

Steven Earnshaw

Section One

Writing: Theories and Contexts

1

Theories of Creativity and Creative Writing Pedagogy

Anna Leahy, Mary Cantrell and Mary Swander

Creative writing as a distinct academic field – one with dedicated courses and programmes, with professors whose scholarship is entirely or primarily original creative work, and with professional journals and books devoted to reflections upon the field – is relatively new but has been rapidly expanding in the US, the UK, and elsewhere. As such, we are just beginning to amass articulated theories about the creative process and how we might best teach creative writing as an academic discipline. Joseph Moxley (1989), Wendy Bishop and Hans Ostrom (1994), and D. G. Meyers (1996) documented the emergence of creative writing as an academic pursuit in the US. To grasp the current state of the field, it is important to consider its overall and recent history, the dominant approaches to creativity and to creative writing pedagogy, and the application of theories and approaches to classrooms.

The history of creative writing as an academic pursuit

Today, in virtually every college and university across the US, students busily workshop, as we say, each other's poems and short stories. These students roam the hallways with stacks of copied poems, stories, and essays or with files looming on their laptops or devices. They enter their creative writing classrooms, pull out or up their marginal notes, and prepare to discuss and offer formative criticism of each other's work. Creative writing is now an established part of the curriculum in higher education, and most English departments have a poet, fiction writer, creative nonfiction writer, or playwright on their rosters. According to Gradschools.com, a comprehensive site on graduate programmes worldwide, the UK, Australia, Ireland, and Canada all have universities offering university and graduate programmes leading to degrees with an emphasis in creative writing. Korea, Mexico, Spain, Norway, and the Philippines also support such programmes. Even high school students in both the US and the UK are often offered the opportunity for creative writing as part of their English studies.

Yet the inclusion of creative writing in academe in the US is a relatively recent phenomenon. As late as 1965, few four-year colleges had resident writers, much less an emphasis in creative writing. While it had become more common for writers to accept university teaching positions, most writers supported their early efforts as they always had: as cabdrivers and carpenters, as postmasters (William Faulkner), journalists (Willa Cather), librarians

(Marianne Moore), insurance executives (Wallace Stevens), and doctors (William Carlos Williams). Visual artists and composers had long before found a home in academe, but writers were still viewed with suspicion. Writing was a craft that one was supposed to pick up by osmosis through a study of literature. If a young writer wanted a mentor, he or she could move to either coast or, better yet, to Paris, buy a cigarette holder and beret, hang out in the coffeehouses and bars, and hope for the best.

The University of Iowa changed the literary landscape in the US. During the 1920s, along the banks of the Iowa River where the summer heat and humidity create a natural greenhouse for the surrounding agricultural fields of corn and beans, the fine arts flourished. When F. Scott Fitzgerald and Zelda were dancing and drinking their way through Europe, when Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas were entertaining Pablo Picasso and Ernest Hemingway with marijuana-laced brownies in Paris, when Ezra Pound was immersing himself in the study of Japanese and Chinese poetry and Fascist ideology in Italy, the University of Iowa fostered young artists in a state known for its conservative, rural values.

Painting, sculpture, theatre, dance, and imaginative writing prospered in Iowa City during the roaring twenties. Then, just as a decade of severe economic depression hit the world, Iowa's creative writing programme began to gain in status and prestige. In 1931, Mary Hoover Roberts's collection of poetry, *Paisley Shawl,* was the first creative writing master's thesis approved by the university. Other theses soon followed by such writers as Wallace Stegner and Paul Engle. Engle's thesis, *Worn Earth,* the 1932 winner of the Yale Younger Poets Award, became the first poetry thesis at the University of Iowa to be published (Wilbers 1980: 39). Norman Foerster, director of the School of Letters, pushed forward with the creative writing programme throughout the 1930s. But when Engle joined the faculty in 1937, he jump-started the Iowa Writers Workshop and became its official director in 1943. He laid the foundation for an institution that would make its mark on the worldwide writing community.

Engle, a hard-driving, egocentric genius, possessed the early vision of both the Writers Workshop and the International Writing Program. He foresaw first-rate programmes where young writers could come to receive criticism of their work. A native Iowan who had studied in England on a Rhodes Scholarship and travelled widely throughout Europe, Engle was dissatisfied with merely a regional approach. He defined his ambition in a 1963 letter to his university president as a desire 'to run the future of American literature, and a great deal of European and Asian, through Iowa City' (Wilbers 1980: 85–6).

During his twenty-four years as director, Engle took a group of fewer than a dozen students and transformed it into a high-profile programme of 250 graduate students at its peak in 1965 (Wilbers 1980: 83). More importantly, he made decisions about creative writing that still define the academic field. For instance, he divided the Workshop into genres – poetry and fiction – to make classes easier to teach, took a personal interest in each student, and functioned as both mentor and godfather. In an essay entitled 'A Miranda's World' in Robert Dana's *A Community of Writers: Paul Engle and the Iowa Writers' Workshop* (1999), Donald Justice describes how Engle picked his wife and himself up from the Iowa City bus station on a cold January day, found them an apartment, and then gave the young poet one of his own wool suits to see him through the bitter winter.

Throughout the years, Engle brought to campus the hottest literary names of the time including Dylan Thomas, W. H. Auden, and Robert Frost. Engle then went on to found the International Writing Program where he poured this same kind of energy into spreading his literary enthusiasm around the globe. Engle's model of rigorous, genre-based workshops,

close-knit communities formed around mentors, and highly respected visiting writers became the standard in the field.

The Iowa Writers Workshop MFA graduates fanned out across the US, and many entered the ranks of academe. English departments, experiencing dwindling numbers of majors, began to open up their doors to creative writers whose classes quickly filled. The black berets and cigarette holders of a previous era were traded in for the tweed jackets and pipes of faculty life. The turbulent late 1960s and early 1970s saw a growth spurt for creative writers in academe, as students not only demanded the end of the Vietnam War and greater civil rights, but more seemingly relevant course work.

Iowa Workshop graduates, in turn, set up their own writing programmes at other universities and produced their own graduate students, who once again set up more programmes. In the UK, creative writing in academe began to take hold as well. In 1969, the University of Lancaster was the first to offer an MA in creative writing. Even when the US academic job market inevitably tightened, academically trained writers found their way into teaching in community colleges in high schools, in state-run writers-in-the-schools programmes, in the prisons, and in youth shelters, retirement homes, elder hostels, and other short, focused noncredit workshops and conferences.

From the fall of 1996 to 2001, according to Andrea Quarracino's report in the *AWP Job List* (2005), the number of tenure-track academic job openings listed with the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) ranged from forty-six to seventy-two but later jumped to more than 100 twice, in 2002 and 2004. In 2013, AWP listed more than 800 creative writing programmes or concentrations. The literary community at large has grown to the point that it touches almost every city in the States. By 2005 in the UK, creative writing had become the fastest growing and most popular field in higher education, with nearly every college and university offering creative writing courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels (Beck 2005).

With this growth, 50 PhD programmes in creative writing emerged by 2013. New kinds of MFA programmes surfaced. In 1976, Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont, was one of the first institutions to offer a high-profile but low-residency graduate MFA programme in creative writing. Students and faculty came together for two intense, on-campus weeks twice a year, then conducted their courses through one-on-one correspondence. Students and faculty could then retain their existing jobs while taking part in the programme. There was no need for relocation nor for financial aid in the form of teaching assistantships. Since the early 1970s, low-residency programmes in the US now number more than 50, according to AWP, and exist in the UK as well.

With the turn of the twenty-first century came specialisation within MFA creative writing programmes. In 2004, Seattle Pacific University launched an MFA programme highlighting writing about spirituality. The programme's website describes its mission:

> The low-residency MFA at SPU is a creative writing program for apprentice writers – both Christians and those of other traditions – who not only want to pursue excellence in the craft of writing but also place their work within the larger context of the Judeo–Christian tradition of faith.

Both Chatham University and Iowa State University began to offer MFA degrees that focus on particular topics. Chatham's MFA emphasises place-based writing and social justice and allows students to work across genres. Iowa State's creative writing programme has defined its mission this way:

> Under the broad rubric of 'environment', our MFA program in Creative Writing and the Environment would offer an original and intensive opportunity for gifted students of nonfiction, fiction, poetry, and drama to document, meditate on, celebrate, and mourn the reciprocal transformation of humanity and our world/s. (Iowa State University 2005: 2)

By 2013, the University of Alaska Anchorage now had a low residency program with an option of a special emphasis on writing about the relationships between people and place, landscape, nature, science and the arts, no matter where these relationships exist or how they are expressed. And the MFA Program in Utah had a modular approach with emphasis in Environmental Humanities, History of the American West, and Book Arts. Likewise, in the UK, students can now earn MAs, MPhils, and PhDs with an emphasis in creative writing in the traditional categories of poetry, fiction, and playwriting but can also link creative writing with science, critical theory, journalism, or the teaching of creative writing (Beck 2005).

As writing programmes mature and develop, the field is also re-thinking its pedagogy. Until around 1990, most creative writing faculty followed the Engle teaching model without much reflection. A workshop teacher led small groups – *The AWP Directors' Handbook* (2003: 5) recommends no more than fifteen, with twelve as ideal, but recognises that most workshop groups now are between eleven and twenty – through peer oral critiques of completed poems, stories, chapters of novels, or plays. In the Engle model, the criticism was meant to be tough and could save the writer years of individual trial and error. But the criticism could also become personality-driven or downright nasty. Little emphasis was placed on structure, work in process, or revision.

Currently, many workshop faculty across the US and UK have adapted Engle's model, are experimenting with creating new approaches to teaching creative writing, and are distinguishing methods used in graduate courses from those used in undergraduate courses. Some teach from assignments on technique and structure, whereas others initiate a process of constant revision. Some lecture to huge rooms of students on technique, then break into smaller workshops. Others emphasise working exclusively in even smaller groups of four or five students.

Texts such as *Power and Identity in the Creative Writing Classroom* articulate current practices and suggest new possibilities, in this case offering

> various ways to configure authority: as the expertise of the teacher or of the students, as agency or action for accomplishing things, as a set of mutually beneficial or agreed-upon guidelines for fostering success, as a set of evaluation criteria, as seemingly inherent forces in writing and teaching, and even as authorship itself. (Leahy 2005: i)

In 2004 in the UK, *New Writing: the International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* was launched under the editorship of Graeme Harper. This journal, published by Multilingual Matters, includes peer-reviewed pedagogy articles as well as shorter creative work. *Can It Really Be Taught?: Resisting Lore in Creative Writing Pedagogy* (Ritter and Vanderslice 2007) is a collection asserting that creative writing has too long been a separatist pedagogy based on undocumented and uncritical lore. The editors and authors examine this lore and argue for reframing the discipline and most importantly its pedagogy in relation to intellect rather than ego. Some of these same faculty members on both continents who have helped to restructure writing workshops have also made an effort to provide their own students with pedagogical training. More recent books about creative

writing pedagogy include *Teaching Creative Writing* (Beck 2012) and *Does the Writing Workshop Still Work?* (Donnelly 2010). In addition, *The Program Era* (McGurl 2011) analyses the effects that the rise of creative writing in the academy has had on literary fiction published in the US. Many MFA programmes, such as those at Cardiff University, Antioch University of Los Angeles, and Indiana University, offer internships, courses, or postgraduate certificates in Teaching Creative Writing.

Writing workshops abroad, too, are now commonplace. A budding writer can go off for a summer to study creative writing in a number of international cities including Dublin, Paris, and Prague. The University of Iowa's Nonfiction Writing Program offers its writers study-abroad workshops in a different location every year; recent destinations have included the Philippines, Greece, and Cuba. In 2005, Iowa State University set up the first international writers-in-the-schools programme – a form of service learning – in Trinidad and Tobago, where Iowa State graduate students taught creative writing in K-12 schools in a Caribbean country with virtually no creative writing curriculum. Now that creative writing has established itself as an academic pursuit, its programmes are expanding, especially as academic options expand more generally.

Approaches to creativity and pedagogy

The Iowa Writers' Workshop declares on its website: 'Though we agree in part with the popular insistence that writing cannot be taught, we exist and proceed on the assumption that talent can be developed, and we see our possibilities and limitations as a school in that light'. The 'model for contemporary writing programs', by its own accounts, bases itself in part upon the most widely influential theory underpinning creativity and creative writing: the Romantic myth. The premises of this approach to creativity include that talent is inherent and essential, that creative writing is largely or even solely an individual pursuit, and that inspiration not education drives creativity. For the Iowa Writers' Workshop, that means, 'the fact that the Workshop can claim as alumni nationally and internationally prominent poets, novelists, and short story writers is, we believe, more the result of what they brought here than of what they gained from us'. The Romantic myth is a positive influence on creative writing in a variety of ways. This approach values the very act of creation that is difficult for writers themselves to articulate and values the relative isolation that, even in academe, seems necessary to write. In addition, it links writing with concepts of beauty and originality.

To state openly and confidently that creative writing cannot be taught, however, puts the field at risk as a serious *academic* pursuit. If creative writing cannot be taught, then it might also follow that student work cannot be evaluated and programmes cannot be assessed; creative writing does not, then, fit easily into academic contexts.

Brent Royster in 'Inspiration, creativity, and crisis: the Romantic myth of the writer meets the postmodern classroom' (2005) points to many aspects of the Romantic myth as problematic for the field. He demonstrates the dominance of Romantic ideology in popular culture as well as in the field's own venues such as the *AWP Writer's Chronicle* and *Poets & Writers*. Royster turns to the work of Csikszentmihalyi:

> Csikszentmihalyi's model, simply put, refutes the idea that solely the individual generates a creative work. On the contrary, though his dynamic model of creativity still illustrates the individual's role in the creative process, equal agency is distributed among the social and cultural systems influencing that individual. (2005: 32)

What feels like inspiration to the isolated writer can be articulated instead as a dynamic set of forces coming together:

> Rather than claiming that this inspiration came from somewhere beyond the writer, it seems more apt to suggest that the mind of the artist has reached an opportune moment in which rhythms, sounds, and connotations seem to arise unbidden from memory. (Royster 2005: 34)

This approach allows the writer to define him- or herself as an active participant in a larger, dynamic process. This view of creativity values both individual writer and culture or community and supports the concept of the multi-vocal workshop-based classroom.

The University of Cardiff offers a graduate degree in the 'Teaching and Practice of Creative Writing', according to its website, thereby claiming that creative writing can be taught and that the combination of creativity and pedagogy is an important emerging area: 'With increased interest in the relevance of creativity to current educational practices, this degree will place students advantageously for many types of teaching opportunities'. Programmes like this one and the graduate programme at Antioch University of Los Angeles reconfigure the field to include teaching. As a whole, the tension between the Romantic myth and various responses to it seems productive, allowing for a variety of approaches and debates that recognise the seriousness and rigor of the pursuit and the field's distinct pedagogical theories and practices.

Those who teach writing are very often situated in academe just down the hall from literary scholars, and most writing instructors would agree that good writers read a lot and that understanding written texts offers models, tools, and ideas for one's own writing. Elaine Scarry argues that beauty begets itself, that to read a beautiful sonnet urges one to reproduce that beauty, and that 'this willingness continually to revise one's own location in order to place oneself in the path of beauty is the basic impulse underlying education' (Scarry 1999: 7). Neurologist Alice Flaherty asserts, 'writer's block is not an inevitable response to masterpieces. They can inspire' (2004: 106). Indeed, creative writers can use literature and literary theory to help them understand and respond to the tradition (see Lauri Ramey's chapter, 'Creative Writing and Critical Theory', in this section). Madison Smartt Bell implies that grasping form through reading is foundational for writers: 'The reader who wants to write as well has got to go beyond the intuitive grasp of form to the deliberate construction of form' (1997: 22). In other words, teaching writing depends upon the study of existing texts in order that students comprehend how to construct texts of their own. Kim Addonizio and Dorianne Laux (1997: 105) offer a similar stance for poets:

> Poets need to tune their ears as finely as musicians; that's why reading poems aloud is a good idea . . . You need not be familiar with meter to gain an appreciation for the rhythms of writers' lines, and to begin to work with this principle yourself.

Moreover, Addonizio and Laux put the necessity of studying literature bluntly: 'To write without any awareness of a tradition you are trying to become part of would be self-defeating' (1997: 13). Reading literature and understanding it is part of being a writer.

Our other colleagues down the hall, at least in the US, are compositionists, who have been variously at odds with and in league with creative writers. Composition is often perceived as the department's curricular service to the university and creative writing is often perceived as the frivolous pursuit of eccentrics. Many creative writing teachers in the US today have drawn from graduate-school training in teaching composition and from composition theorists. Wendy Bishop is the lead example of a theorist who straddled the fence between composition and creative writing, who attempted to bring the theories underpin-

ning the two disciplines together, and who brought not only composition approaches to creative writing but also vice versa. One of the important arguments that Bishop (2003: xi) and other compositionists have made to counter the assertion that writing is less rigorous than literary study is that writing courses have content and that writing is 'important *work*'. Bishop (2003: 234) argues that students 'should approach composition classes and creative writing classes in pretty similar ways. Overall, both types of classrooms need to encourage *and reward* risk taking and experimentation as you learn to conform to and break genre conventions'. Some argue the possibility that composition and creative writing are versions of the same field, while others argue that despite commonalities, discipline distinctions must be respected.

Cognitive science and creative writing share some history, in that both fields made great gains as academic pursuits only in the last half-century. Linguists like George Lakoff have been studying metaphor, cognition, and the arts for decades. Bell (1997), in the first section of *Narrative Design* entitled 'Unconscious mind', discusses the cognitive processes of creative writers, though he does not use terminology or specific theories of cognitive science. Likewise, Addonizio and Laux claim: 'We continually make comparisons and connections, often without realizing that we are doing so, so comfortable are we with seeing in this way' (1997: 94). Flaherty also discusses the cognitive process of creativity, in which we are able to make new, unexpected connections. These comparisons and connections that become images and metaphors in our poems are results of cognition and are of primary concern to Lakoff and others.

Existing theories of cognition underpin current pedagogical practices such as the workshop-based classroom and the battle against cliché as well as how the theories might improve our teaching. John T. Bruer notes:

> Instruction based on cognitive theory envisions learning as an active, strategic process . . . It recognizes that learning is guided by the learners' introspective awareness and control of their mental processes. It emphasizes that learning is facilitated by social, collaborative settings that value self-directed student dialogue. (1999: 681)

The workshop-based creative writing classroom – a nontraditional academic approach – presents writing as this sort of active, strategic process: all students must actively engage, student-writers become increasingly aware of how their own and others' decision-making affects written work, and the writing process is situated within an interactive, dynamic classroom where students share informed criticism. We are using a pedagogy that is supported by findings in cognitive science.

Studies show, too, that students' embedded knowledge structures and prevalent misconceptions are resistant to traditional instruction. As Bruer (1999: 682) states: 'The result is that students encode, or learn, schemata that are very different from those which teachers are attempting to impart'. To apply this problem to creative writing, we might consider, for instance, how schemata of narrative are embedded in our students' brains through interaction with television and video games. Or, we might consider students' relative unfamiliarity with poetry, or their deeply embedded schemata of poetry based on nursery rhymes, as an opportunity to build new schemata or build upon existing schemata of language's rhythm.

Cognitive science, too, offers ways to categorise learning and memory. Henry L. Roediger III and Lyn M. Goff offer an overview: '*Procedural memory* refers to the knowledge of how to do things such as walking, talking, riding a bicycle, tying shoelaces. Often the knowledge represented is difficult to verbalize, and the procedures are often acquired slowly and only after much practice' (1999: 250). Procedural memory is a way to understand learning in

creative writing classrooms as slowly accumulated knowledge deeply internalised through practice that emerges as if known all along. Flaherty (2004: 242) offers a similar take: 'on its own the sensation of inspiration is not enough . . . Perhaps the feeling of inspiration is merely a pleasure by which your brain lures you into working harder'. If we think of inspiration as a cognitive event, how can creative writing courses best create the conditions for it and foster the work of writing?

With its workshop model, creative writing is a field with what Lee Shulman has termed, though he used professions like law and medicine as examples, 'signature pedagogies', which are distinct and commonly recognizable

> types of teaching that organize the fundamental ways in which future practitioners are educated in their new professions. In these signature pedagogies, the novices are instructed in critical aspects of the three fundamental dimensions of professional work – to *think*, to *perform*, and to *act with integrity*. (2005: 52)

We must continue to define, support, and improve upon our signature pedagogy. Ultimately, of course, the burden and the opportunity for both teacher and student is to write.

Applying theory to practice in creative writing courses

Creative writing has defined itself in opposition to established practices in higher education, and this stance as much as any theory has contributed to classroom practices. This stance has also resulted in an approach to teaching markedly different from other disciplines: no lectures, no exams, decentralised authority, and student ownership of the learning process. Before composition theory touted the importance of audience and process, creative writing professors recognised that writers benefit from an immediate and worthy audience for their emerging work. The workshop, therefore, attempts to create a sort of literary café in which students earnestly analyse a classmate's poem or story, pointing out how it succeeds and what the writer might do to improve it and offering perspective that enables the writer to re-envision and revise, often for a portfolio of polished work.

Although different professors and tutor-writers implement the workshop – the signature pedagogy – differently, common practices exist, and the advent of online teaching has not altered that pedagogy significantly. Most often, before coming to class, students post each other's works to the course website or provide print copies of their works to classmates, who prepare for the upcoming class by reading and annotating the works with thoughtful, formative criticism. During class, the instructor leads discussion of the student works by asking questions, keeps the comments grounded in relevant and meaningful criteria, and maintains civility and respect among all students. Along with students, professors offer suggestions for improving not just the piece under discussion but also the approach to and understanding of craft and of the creative process. To minimise attempts to justify the work under discussion and to maximise introspection, the writer remains silent while the class discusses his or her draft. Professors also work individually with students during conferences, lecture on specific techniques, and assign practice writing exercises. By reserving official, final, or summative evaluation – the grade – of the creative work for the end of the academic term, the workshop approach privileges process over product and emphasises the complexity and time-consuming nature of the creative arts.

While student works comprise the major texts for the course, many professors assign reading from literature anthologies as well but approach and discuss these texts with a writerly slant. Pulitzer Prize-winning author Jane Smiley (1999: 250) maintains that, for

writers, the study of literature provides distance from the ego and allows students to see the connections their work has to other literature. In *On Becoming a Novelist*, John Gardner notes that the writer 'reads other writers to see how they do it (how they avoid overt manipulation)' (1983: 45–6). He advises writers to read to see how effects are achieved, to question whether they would have approached the situation in the same way and to consider whether their way 'would have been better or worse, and why'. Similarly, R. V. Cassill, in *Writing Fiction*, explains that 'what the writer wants to note . . . is how the story, its language and all its parts have been joined together' (1975: 6). Great literature, therefore, models technique for writers.

As the popularity of creative writing classes has increased, more textbooks focusing on technique have emerged for use alongside student work and published literature. The *AWP Hallmarks of an Effective BFA Program or BA Major in Creative Writing* suggests that undergraduate creative writing courses 'require craft texts and literary works (anthologies, books by individual authors, literary periodicals) that offer appropriate models for student writing'. Most creative writing textbooks present chapters discussing specific elements of various genres and offer exercises to help students master these techniques. While textbooks acknowledge the difficulty of articulating foolproof guidelines, the authors assume would-be writers benefit from instruction on craft. In her introduction to *Write Away: One Novelist's Approach to Fiction and the Writing Life*, for example, Elizabeth George explains that for those who teach creative writing, 'craft is the point'; it is 'the soil in which a budding writer can plant the seed of her idea in order to nurture it into a story' (2005: x). Similarly, Addonizio and Laux state that 'Craft provides the tools: knowing how to make a successful metaphor, when to break a line, how to revise and rewriting – these are some of the techniques the aspiring poet must master' (1997: 11). Heather Sellers, in *The Practice of Creative Writing*, tells students that creative writing is 'about crafting language – words on a page – so that a reader (a stranger!) will have a specific kind of emotional experience. Design is the key word' (2013:4).

Unlike texts for other disciplines, creative writing texts seldom provide instructor's editions or supplements that ground the instructions and exercises in theories about learning to write, in part because even the teacher is yet another writer in the classroom. The hallmarks for successful undergraduate and graduate creative writing programmes in *The AWP Directors' Handbook* state that creative writing faculty consist of 'writers whose work has been published by nationally known, professional journals and presses respected by other writers, editors, and publishers' (2003: 15). These hallmarks stipulate, 'the criteria for promotion, assignment of classes, and tenure of creative writing faculty focus on publication of creative work, demonstrated ability as teachers of creative writing, and contributions to the university and greater literary community' (2003: 15). In other words, the leading organisation that promotes creative writing as a discipline values writers who teach more than teachers who write, as do other practice-based professions like medicine and graphic design.

More so than other disciplines, however, creative writing must contend with questions of validity and scholarship. While the blogosphere may allow such criticism to proliferate, the questions have lingered for decades. Flannery O'Connor's now famous remark that universities 'don't stifle enough' writers still holds sway, and pejorative labels such as *workshop story* or *McPoem*, a term coined by Donald Hall, reflect the disdain many feel for the writing that emerges from creative writing programmes. Even some who teach creative writing question its existence as an academic subject. For example, Lynn Freed in her memoir 'Doing time' (2005) confesses that she does not know 'how to pretend to unravel the mystery' (68) of what makes a good story and admits that she sometimes feels as if, by attempting to teach creative writing, she is participating in 'a sham' (72). Most professors

of creative writing do not share Freed's opinion, but they share her despair at the prospect of articulating clearly and accurately what they do. As Richard Cohen states in *Writer's Mind: Crafting Fiction*, 'Technique is what can most efficiently be taught in classrooms, but technique is not the essence of writing' (1995: xvi). George Garrett makes a similar point in 'Going to see the elephant: our duty as storytellers' by claiming that the creative process is magic and mysterious: 'It breaks all the rules as fast as we can make them. Every generalization about it turns out to be at best incomplete or inadequate' (1999: 2).

Nonetheless, creative writing professors do and must make generalisations. 'If the teacher has no basic standards', Gardner writes, 'his class is likely to develop none, and their comments can only be matters of preference or opinion. Writers will have nothing to strive toward or resist, nothing solid to judge by' (1983: 84). Bishop and Ostrom's challenge to 'reexamine what takes place in creative-writing classrooms' (1994: xxii) has resulted not in a uniformity of standards and common learning objectives but in a meaningful dialogue by which professors can make clear what they expect students to learn. The AWP annual conference, for example, features dozens of panels on pedagogy and its website provides a wealth of pedagogical tools. Books such as *What If?* (1990), *The Practice of Poetry* (1992), *The Portable MFA in Creative Writing* (2006) and *Naming the World* (2008) compile exercises and advice from published authors with extensive classroom experiences. Julie Checkoway, former President of the AWP Board of Directors, writes that the successful writers and teachers who contributed to *Creating Fiction* 'have staked their reputations on the notions that when it comes to writing, teaching is at least as important as talent, nurture at least as important as nature' (1999: ix).

How best to teach and nurture writers changes as the population of students and the venues for creative writing classes change, and that comes across in responses to much of the criticism in the blogosphere and also comes across in recent pedagogy scholarship. Like professors in other disciplines, creative writing professors have responded to the influx of students whose different assumptions, expectations, and life experiences necessitate a change in pedagogy. Mark L. Taylor, in 'Generation NeXt: today's postmodern student – meeting, teaching, and serving' points to research suggesting: 'In our postmodern culture, the traditional models of premodern religion and modern science/reason must compete with postmodern consumerism/entertainment and hedonism/immediate needs gratification on a playing field that is level at best' (2005: 104). Current undergraduates, he contends, tend to be accepting of 'everything except people who believe in the hegemony of their chosen model'. Recognising that a student does not enter the classroom a *tabula rasa* and that the aesthetic values inherent in great works of literature may appear arbitrary, exclusive, or contrary to publishing trends or to students' embedded cognitive schemata, creative writing professors have developed strategies for identifying assumptions about literature and reconciling these with other notions of how a text communicates. In his essay, 'On not being nice: sentimentality and the creative writing class', for example, Arthur Saltzman (2003: 324) laments the sentimentality that students bring to the classroom – their tendency 'to be passionate according to formula' – and he strives to 'expose the evaluative criteria that they invariably bring to the discussion' of poetry. Discussing both his and his students' assumptions about poetry allows Saltzman to help students develop 'more specific and involved responses' with the hope that they 'become more demanding of the poems they encounter and produce' (2003: 325).

Being explicit about evaluative standards is in the interest of students, but articulating learning objectives also helps legitimise the difficult work students and teachers do in creative writing classrooms. Although institutional assessments may have limited value in determining whether students will be successful writers, six regional accrediting bodies

in the US require institutions to develop, articulate, and assess standards and to improve student learning. The UK has the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education as its regulating body, which requires module-by-module assessment and external examiners to an even greater extent than is required in the US. More importantly, creative writing professors and tutor-writers have taken ownership of the ways in which creative writing is evaluated. In a creative writing class, marks or grades reflect comprehension and application of specific writing strategies as well as prolific writing. Many professors provide numerous and varied opportunities to demonstrate competency, including exercises, analyses of published work, and even quizzes or exams along with the portfolio of creative work.

As creative writing continues to define itself as a rigorous, academic discipline, professors will need to take into account the technological and demographic changes taking place. Online courses and programmes as well as online magazines, hypertexts, and blogs offer the prospect of reaching specific audiences and challenging assumptions about what constitutes publication. Cathy Day, for instance, is a creative writing professor and blogger who is redesigning her workshops for the twenty-first century and writing about it as she goes. How are professors addressing these new venues and texts? What teaching strategies have they developed to accommodate diverse groups of distance learners and to maintain the high standards for which college-level courses in creative writing are known? How successfully is the workshop environment being translated to the Internet? What are the standards by which different texts are judged?

At the same time, changes in the publishing industry limit some opportunities for novice writers while opening up other possibilities. Despite the number of writing courses and programmes, according to the National Endowment for the Arts' *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America* (2004), the percentage of book readers at all ages has declined significantly over the past two decades. A follow-up study in 2007 revealed that 'teens and young adults read less often and for shorter amounts of time compared with other age groups and with Americans of previous years'. At the same time, more people are choosing to read e-books, to order books online, or download books illegally for free, the result being that many smaller presses and local bookstores have vanished. One of the few increases in literary activity has been in creative writing. These trends raise questions regarding who reads the works produced by writers from now more numerous creative writing programmes. Many authors turn to other avenues to find readers for their works, choosing, for example, to self-publish, publish online, or use software to produce downloadable novels and story and poetry collections. Whether publishing online or in print, writers more and more are responsible for promoting their works. Such changes offer the field opportunities to continue to refine and expand curricula, to explore the theoretical foundations on which the curricula are based, and to contribute to literary excellence within and outside of the academy.

Conclusion

Creative writing is an academic pursuit with a documented history that shapes its current theories and practices. The field has become increasingly varied in its curricula, moving away from foundations of literary scholarship to the signature pedagogy based on the workshop model and, more recently, to manifestations in low-residency, service-learning, and web-based iterations so that creative writers in academe – both professors and students – not only develop talent and craft but also bear witness to contemporary culture and develop transferable cognitive and communicative skills. Creative writing has borrowed

and reshaped theoretical approaches from literary criticism, composition studies, linguistics, and even cognitive science. These foundations underpin a rigorous, rewarding academic experience in creative writing classrooms in the US, the UK, and increasingly around the globe. Though Dorothea Brande found the way creative writing was taught to be problematic seventy years ago, her claim in *Becoming a Writer* about our endeavour holds true today: 'there is no field where one who is in earnest about learning to do good work can make such enormous strides in so short a time' (1934: 27). Though challenges in the field still exist – perhaps *because* they exist – creative writing has come into its own within academe over the last four decades.

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2

The Evaluation of Creative Writing at MA Level (UK)

Jenny Newman

Can creative writing be assessed?

When the first creative writing MAs in the UK were founded in the late 1960s and early 70s, many traditional scholars and academics argued that no one could teach the mysterious and fascinating process of literary creativity, and that such courses had no place in a university. Their objections have been overturned, partly, it must be said, because of student demand for accredited creative writing courses from under-funded and money-hungry universities. A few literature dons, however, still follow the critic John Carey in maintaining that the evaluation of works of art is purely subjective and thus cannot be codified (Carey 2005: 52). Others say, with the novelist and former lecturer David Lodge, that no one can teach you 'how to produce a text other people will willingly give up their time – and perhaps their money – to read, although it has no utilitarian purpose or value' – and that the more advanced the course, the more heartbreak is likely to be associated with it (Lodge 1996: 176). Other lecturers and writers feel that good art overturns the rules, and that subjecting potential poets, playwrights and novelists to a series of tasks for assessment stifles genuine creativity.

Most tutor-writers would agree that they cannot impart originality or perseverance. But they do claim that they know how to foster talent in an academic environment where students can learn through workshops with fellow writers, and have access to libraries, conferences and electronic resources. Also, like university painters and musicians, tutor-writers know how to teach tradition and technique. Nor need they find it impossible to tell good writing from bad. Generations of critics and lecturers (including John Carey) have written books assessing writers past and sometimes even present. Although pundits fall out over individual cases, societies as a whole seem able to form a consensus even about what has only just been written. The Pulitzer, the Man Booker, the *Palme d'Or,* the Whitbread, the *Prix Goncourt*, the Orange and the International Man Booker: major prizes – and hundreds of minor ones – proliferate. Judging panels proclaim their manifestos, and their long lists and shortlists spark passionate and often knowledgeable debate on review pages, television and radio arts programmes, and among panels of experts and celebrities. New films, fiction, poetry and plays are judged good or bad by critics who offer their reasons at length. Fortified by generations of successful graduates, and by having road tested their grounds for awarding high and low marks, many tutors now assert that 'criteria for creative

writing should be no more difficult to ascertain than for any other subject area, creative or not' (Atkinson 2000/2001: 26).

This chapter is intended to explore the evaluation of creative writing at postgraduate level, to help you choose the MA with the 'assessment pattern' best suited to your needs, and to enable you to avoid some of the pitfalls awaiting postgraduate writers.

Choosing a course

There is no standard curriculum for Creative Writing MAs, and they vary dramatically in their approach to writing, their teaching methods, their links with theatres, screenwriters, agents, publishers and production companies, and in their graduates' success rate. Some courses allow you to choose between poetry, fiction, screenwriting or scriptwriting, and to study full-time (typically a year) or part-time (typically two years). Though most Creative Writing degrees are not, strictly speaking, professional qualifications, many have 'modules' or 'pathways' which enable you to learn how to run a writers' workshop in a school, hospital, prison or hospice, or to edit a magazine, or to sample jobs in publishing, or film, or in the growing field of writing and mental health.

Not all university websites are user-friendly, but it is worth taking the time to search them for inspiration. Even if you are confined for personal reasons to a specific locality, you may have more choice than you think. As a subject, Creative Writing is booming, and more MAs are being offered every year, even by highly traditional universities. Do not be deterred if you do not have a first degree, or are older than the traditional student. Many institutions value life experience, and consider a promising portfolio and a strong commitment to writing, to be more important than formal qualifications. Students' ages range from twenty-one to sixty or even seventy, and some courses have a median age of thirty-eight or higher.

No website can tell you all you need to know, so you will need a brochure, or ideally a range (most websites allow you to request one online). Find out the names of the tutors, and read their plays, novels or poems; but remember that, though likelier to attract the attention of agents and publishers, a prestigious course may not best suit your needs. The ways in which an MA will develop and evaluate your writing are more important than its reputation in the national press, so ask yourself which one will best foster in you what Graeme Harper describes as 'creative practice and an understanding of creative practice' (Harper 2003: 1). If those courses near you seem unsuitable, or if you live in a remote spot, you could consider enrolling on an online or distance learning MA. Make a shortlist of those that interest you, and if you still cannot choose, email your queries to the admissions tutors, or ask for a telephone discussion, or a preliminary and informal interview.

What follows are some typical enquiries from potential MA students about the way their writing will be assessed:

- Do I have to submit an entrance portfolio? If so, how long should it be and what are the criteria? When is the deadline for submission and when will I be told the result?
- Will I be interviewed? Are you willing to interview over the telephone? What sort of students are you looking for?
- Do you accept students writing in their second language?
- Will I be able to switch from full-time to part-time if my financial circumstances change?
- Does the group size vary between lectures and workshops?
- As the course is by correspondence, does it include residentials or summer schools, locally run workshops, or online chatrooms in 'real' time?

- I think I might be dyslexic and I've been out of education for years. Do you offer study skills support?
- How many contact hours can I expect, and is there an attendance requirement?
- Will I be made to submit work in more than one genre (for example, scriptwriting, fiction, or poetry)?
- Does the MA have a critical or academic component, or will it focus exclusively on my writing?
- How much feedback will I be given and in what form? Will I get one-to-one tutorials from real writers? Can I choose my tutor?
- What are the course's links to publishers, agents and screenwriters?
- How successful are its graduates? Do you provide a list of former students whom I can contact to ask about the course?
- Who teaches the course, and how many visiting writers and publishers are invited?

The Assessment Pattern

An 'assessment pattern' is a list of the written, practical (if any), oral (if any) and online (if any) assignments you will be required to submit in order to graduate. Under regulations formulated by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in England and Wales (QAA), tutors can only assess what they have formally taught. The assessment pattern can therefore be seen as a more accurate guide to the course itself than what tutors may maintain is important. Although no student can fully understand its rationale before completing it, it is well worth knowing its requirements in advance, and in written form.

According to QAA guidelines, an assessment pattern should include a semester-by-semester schedule, a credit rating for each module (and a total of 180) which enables you to gauge the importance the course team attaches to each assignment, and information about word lengths. The submission dates will be carefully timed and posted well in advance.

Creative writing courses do not have as yet the explicit national standards or 'benchmarks' for assessment that have been compiled for many other longer established subjects. Most Creative Writing MAs teach more than creative writing (see the range of assessment tasks, below) and have several methods of assessment. The majority of courses have an academic or critical component. In some universities the latter is as high as 40 or 50 per cent, and courses are taught mainly by academics, not writers.

But assessment isn't only a test or a barrier. It is intended to motivate you to acquire and practise new techniques, to read widely, to analyse what you have written and read, and to reflect on your creative processes. Your assignments should also allow your tutor to gauge your progress, to diagnose errors and enable you to rectify them, and to offer you expert feedback and advice. A good assessment pattern can add variety to your experience of being a student and will also allow you to recognise your achievements, and monitor your development as a writer.

What follows are some popular examples of MA assessment tasks, plus a brief rationale of each.

Analytical essay

Good writers are avid viewers or readers, and all postgraduate courses encourage their students to become aware of the tradition in which they work, and of contemporary fiction, poetry or scripts. This process is often assessed through an analytical essay on significant

work already published or produced, in which the student demonstrates his or her power to read or view for technique.

Critical commentary

This typically accompanies a piece of the student's creative writing. Its purpose differs slightly from course to course, but it is often used to place student work in a tradition, and in relation to recent or contemporary performances, films or publications. Rather than interpreting their writing, students can describe their intentions, their creative processes, the methods they used to resolve any challenges to technique, and the extent to which they felt they were successful. By identifying and analysing problems, a Critical Commentary can allow the tutor to reward ambitious creative writing which did not fully succeed. In some institutions the Critical Commentary is called a Supplementary Discourse, involving the separate discipline of poetics. Though most courses do not award the Commentary a specific proportion of the overall mark, it is often graded out of a notional 20 per cent, and the piece of creative work it accompanies out of a notional 80 per cent.

Oral presentation or pitch to the student group

This assesses the student's ability to talk about his or her work as if to agents, publishers, producers or readers, or to an interviewer on television or radio.

Website

Increasingly agents and publishers scout for talent on the web. At least one British MA programme teaches students to build their own writer's website, and to showcase their work, make links to other relevant sites, and present themselves as writers.

Précis or synopsis

Such material can help students to clarify their aims, understand their future market, and consider some of the writing or publishing industry's social, geographical or economic determinants.

Little magazine

Many courses ask students to learn editorial and group skills by collaborating over a platform for their work. This is often accompanied by research into other outlets, national, international or online.

Drafting and notebook-keeping

While these activities cannot – and perhaps should not – be formally assessed, some MAs require evidence of both.

Workshops

Sessions in groups of preferably no more than eight enable students to present their work to their tutors and peers (see 'Types and processes of assessment: Workshops', below).

Though verbal contributions should probably not be measured formally, the experience can feed into students' writing, as well as into their Commentaries or Supplementary Discourses.

Editing or proofreading exercise

This tests students' ability to identify and correct errors of punctuation, typography and spelling on a piece of published or unpublished work.

Analytical essay on a piece of original work by a fellow student

This assignment requires wide reading and research, and hones ideas about technique, and critical skills. It is particularly useful for those who will later earn their living as publishers or editors.

Creative writing

The portfolio that you build up during your course is likely to have the highest credit rating in the assessment pattern, and will be your 'calling card' when you contact agents or publishers. Find out the overall word length in advance. Some courses demand a whole novel, for example, or a collection of poetry, or two full-length scripts, and may allow you a year or more after the end of the taught component in which to complete your manuscript, supported by timed tutorials. Others ask for only twelve to fifteen thousand words or equivalent, and will expect you to submit them within the one- or two-year span of the course.

How your writing will be assessed

Criteria

Clear and thoughtful criteria 'owned' by all your tutors can be seen as a manifesto of the departmental spirit and of what it seeks to develop and impart. They may also endorse a university's 'mission', and play to the tutors' expertise and areas of research.

Though students often ignore them until an assignment is due, assessment criteria should be consulted in advance. They explain what tutors reward and penalise when they mark your work, and will be referred to in your written and oral feedback. The criteria will also inform workshop discussions, and both written and oral self and peer appraisal, and any Critical Commentaries you write to accompany your original work.

Criteria form the grounds for the discussions between your tutors about the marks they award you, and the annual exercises in which they grade anonymous scripts, then compare and discuss their verdicts. Criteria also form the basis of any appeal against a tutor's decision (see 'Appeals procedures', below). On some courses creative writing criteria vary from genre to genre, in others not. Either way, subsidiary sets of criteria are usually applied when the course includes diverse assessment tasks.

All criteria should be readily available in student handbooks and on the university website.

Grading

Most MAs are Pass/Fail degrees with the possibility of a Distinction. Your work, however, is usually awarded a percentage, and criteria are subdivided according to the standard BA degree classification system (1st, II.i, etc.).

What follows is a set of typical creative writing criteria, which has been adapted and amalgamated from those of five well-established MA creative writing programmes, most of which had poetry, prose and script components. Its categories are intended to give helpful and detailed feedback, but not to be prescriptive or exhaustive, or to reduce your tutors' thoughts to a simple grid. The divisions can better be seen as overlapping sets of guidelines rather than watertight compartments.

70 per cent + (Distinction)

Impressionistically, work in this range can be said to delight and excite through its ability to engage the reader or viewer or listener at a sophisticated level. More formally, it demonstrates an overall coherence of tone, control of narrative strategies, an inventive use of language and a distinctive 'voice'. It displays evidence of original observation, of a knowledge – if only implied – of varieties of structure, and of the tradition(s) in which the student is working, or choosing to subvert. Dialogue and idiom, if used, are effective, and spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax and editing are impeccable. Presentation is to the standard normally required by agents and publishers when considering work for publication.

60–9 per cent (Pass)

Work in this category could be described as ambitious, with a clearly discernible narrative voice, though not as assured or coherent as that of work in the highest category. Nevertheless, the writing will show a strong understanding of its chosen form or genre, and of its artistic or literary context and tradition. The subject matter will be freshly approached, dialogue and idiom well handled, and the use of description and detail effective. The presentation will be almost of the standard required for submission to agents and publishers.

50–9 per cent (Pass)

Work awarded a mark in this band will generally have reached a satisfactory standard of invention and proficiency, with a clearly discernible narrative or theme, though there may inconsistencies of characterisation or plot. The conception may not be as fresh or striking as that of work in the higher categories, and tend towards the derivative or 'safe'. Though there will be evidence of redrafting, the use of technique might at points be limited or clumsy, with a sometimes indiscriminate choice of language or a reliance on cliché. N. B.: Even in these days of what some see as 'grade inflation', the work of half or more of a new MA group may fall into this band, and a mark at the upper end, in particular, should be seen not as grounds for discouragement, but as no mean achievement.

40–9 per cent (Pass)

This is the lowest bracket of work deemed worthy of a pass. Although it may show some understanding of the potential of its form, writing in this category is usually limited in conception and approach. It may demonstrate some fluency and technical competence, but lack coherence and clarity. It may also be structurally weak, with a patchy control of style and tone, stereotypical situations or characters, and hackneyed details. The layout may be confusing, and spelling, syntax and punctuation will probably be erratic.

Below 40 per cent (Fail)
Work in this category is deemed unworthy of a pass at postgraduate level, and will generally be poorly conceived and clumsily written. Though it may show some grasp of what is required, it may be rambling, difficult to follow or just plain boring. It may show little evidence of observation and descriptive skills, and lack a coherent tone, or knowledge of tradition, and be substantially under or over the required word length. The writer's purpose may remain unclear, and presentation will typically be careless, with repeated mistakes of spelling, syntax, layout and punctuation.

Types and processes of assessment

Formative and summative

Your coursework will be assessed in ways that are known as 'formative' and 'summative'. Formative assessment is not linked to a mark, and focuses on strengths and points for improvement. Summative assessment often involves an element of the formative (such as a feedback sheet or a tutorial), but crucially awards a mark to a piece of work that counts towards your final result.

What follows are the main forms of each activity.

Formative assessment by a tutor

No tutor, no matter how good a writer, can tell you what to write; but he or she will understand the creative process, be aware of your aims and ambitions, and help to guide and inspire. His or her formative role is to read and analyse your writing, to help you identify strengths and weaknesses, to answer your questions about technique, to recommend suitable reading and to prompt revision, in a workshop or one-to-one tutorial, or on a feedback sheet. In this kind of feedback a diligent and knowledgeable tutor can resemble the best professional editor imaginable.

Summative assessment by a tutor

When they award marks which contribute to your degree, tutors formally represent the institution, and are responsible for maintaining academic standards (see 'Marking procedures', below). This is the course's most official aspect and the most likely to be contested (see 'Appeals procedures', below).

Formative assessment by students

Learning how to evaluate and comment on your fellow students' writing most often occurs in workshops, and in the preliminary reading for workshops, and is a highly valued aspect of the course (see 'Workshops', below).

Summative assessment by students

Although peer assessment is usually formative it sometimes, as the course progresses, becomes summative: that is, a student may award a percentage to a peer's workshop submission which will contribute to the peer's final award, though usually to a very limited extent;

and, like all marks, that percentage will be subject to moderation. A detailed comment sheet written in accordance with the assessment criteria usually accompanies and justifies summative peer assessment.

Self-assessment

This formative skill is more demanding than peer assessment, and probably the most important aspect of the course, which will stand you in good stead throughout your writing life. Self-assessment involves learning how to gauge your intentions, to be a responsible parent to your work, and to deepen, revise and edit it. It can be most clearly demonstrated in the Critical Commentary which in many courses accompanies each piece of original work. Here the student reflects on his or her creative practice, the challenges overcome or the flaws which might remain. A student can also anticipate tutor feedback, or invite it on a particular point, so that work in progress resembles a dialogue or a practice space. Written self-assessment is often subject in its turn to formative or summative tutor assessment.

Workshops

Though the work is usually assessed formatively rather than summatively, most students see the creative writing workshop as the heart of the course, and its most beneficial and memorable component. Ground rules are best agreed by students and tutors in advance, and in accordance with their university's Equal Opportunities policy (see 'Equal opportunities', below), so that everyone feels they are being treated fairly and with respect.

Material for discussion should be photocopied and distributed at least a week in advance. To be just to your fellow students, you may need to familiarise yourself with the tradition in which they are writing, read their work several times, and allow yourself time to reflect. All work submitted is work in progress, and part of your fellow students' development as writers, so never be destructive, or fail to offer a creative solution. Feedback which describes and analyses developments of, for example, character, plot or tone, is more helpful than that which simply reaches a verdict, or describes a piece of work as 'boring' or 'not my thing'.

When it is your writing's turn to be considered, remember that readers' impressions are valuable, and may be in short supply when the course is over. Listen to the views of your tutors and fellow students rather than debating them, or defending your work. Although concurring opinions deserve serious consideration, you need to take time to consider them rather than agreeing straightaway. Though no one will oblige you to implement all – or any – suggestions, workshops can contribute substantially to the redrafting process, and to the Critical Commentary which accompanies a piece of creative writing (see 'The assessment pattern', above).

Because a range of spoken opinions on one's writing can be hard to assimilate, each contributor should compile a sheet of written feedback for the student whose work they assessed. The scripts themselves should be annotated and returned, with attention paid to matters such as style, punctuation and layout.

Marking procedures

University marking procedures are monitored by a national body linked to the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) and known as the Quality Assurance Agency for

Higher Education (QAA). The QAA requires that procedures should be 'transparent' to you as a student and made explicit through your handbooks. Grading should follow the established criteria, and work should be marked anonymously where possible.

Major pieces of work should be second marked, and the run of all marks (of tutors, and of students, where submitted) should be moderated by the course or module leader. In British Universities, these processes are scrutinised by an External Examiner who is usually an experienced tutor from a parallel institution, and whose role is to ensure that Quality Assurance Procedures are followed, and that standards tally with those of similar courses. Marks are ratified by a University Examination Board of which the External Examiner, the programme leader or head of department, the course team and a senior administrator are members.

Benefits of assessment

While writing this chapter I distributed a questionnaire to a sample of twenty-five students from three courses. The range was almost evenly balanced in terms of gender, and its median age was twenty-nine. All had at least two part-time years' experience of postgraduate creative writing. The first question was: 'What benefits (if any) have you derived from the assessment of your writing?' (For the second question, see 'Troubleshooting', below). No student was totally negative, and over half listed four or more benefits. What follows is a sample of their replies:

- It gave me a goal and made me organise my time. I'd never have finished my work without the deadlines.
- [Assessment] made us really think about what the tutors were trying to put across.
- The written feedback from students and tutors definitely helped me improve my writing.
- The wide range of things we had to do made us experiment and extend ourselves. Without it, I would never have written a radio play.
- The course took off with the workshops – they were wonderful. My group continued to meet right through the summer, and we'll keep on getting together after the course is over.
- The workshops helped us monitor our progress, and let us know where we stood in relation to other young writers.
- My tutor was a brilliant writer, and my one-to-one tutorials were like a master class.

Troubleshooting

Many tutor-writers value their role in developing and cherishing new writing, including – or sometimes especially – experimental or even quirky writing of high literary merit that may not be market-driven, or readily find a publisher. But not all budding writers thrive on university courses, and not all students are as happy about assessment as those quoted above. Course duration is not organic but artificial, governed by university schedules rather than by writers' growth. Some students feel they are not allowed enough time to assimilate knowledge and develop their techniques. Others feel that their course has let them down when their marks fail to improve – or even grow worse. A few clash with their tutors or fellow students; or find the process of being assessed – or, as one student expressed it, of 'putting myself and my writing on the line' – more challenging than anticipated, and believe that it fosters unhealthy competition.

Some tutors, likewise, have reservations about contemporary aspects of assessment. Writing is not a career path, and even great talent can be erratic or sometimes wane, as can be seen from the output of lifelong writers such as Wordsworth, Tolstoy and Hemingway.

Yet universities are required to provide HEFCE, their funding body, with assessment data, and to undergo QAA inspections, which means that matters such as admissions, failure rates or student withdrawal from courses are subject to government strategies and sometimes even directives. Furthermore, as British university professor Frank Furedi points out, 'lecturers certainly do not have the right to lecture material for which the learning outcome cannot be demonstrated in advance' (Furedi 2004: 76). If, as he and others believe, assessment changes the nature of what is assessed, then student writing might at points become instrumental and even 'bite-sized' to fit cost-cutting timetables, and corporate agendas. As Graeme Harper puts it, 'Both order and disorder produce results for creative writers, yet the University has increasingly become a place of ordered existence' (Harper 2003: 8).

The following comments are culled from the questionnaires from which I quoted in 'Benefits of assessment', above, and were made in response to the question: 'What, if anything, have you found difficult or problematic about the assessment process?'

- I felt I was being judged, and not just like on a normal course. I'd handed over something of myself and it damaged my self-esteem.
- My workshop tutor was an academic not a poet, and she didn't know anything about the creative process or how to help me shape a poem.
- I was the only Black woman on the course and I was writing out of a different tradition to the rest. Sometimes they just didn't get it.
- Having my work scrutinised and graded made me very self-conscious. For the first time in my life I got writer's block. We should have been taught how to give and take criticism before the course started.
- I'd never felt competitive about my writing before but I became very aware of what the tutor's favourites were doing and started comparing myself with them.
- Some of the others didn't seem very committed and their work was quite weak. I was surprised that none of them failed. The tutors seemed to be protecting their [the students'] self-esteem instead of grading them as they deserved.
- There was a tension between the creative and the critical parts of the course, which didn't interest me. I felt I was being turned into an academic – and only because they didn't have enough writers on the staff.
- I didn't like my tutor's novels and felt that he didn't understand what I was trying to write.

Appeals procedures

If you have met all your deadlines and obligations, and have taken into account the assessment criteria, yet feel an assignment has been unfairly graded, you have the right to ask for it to be remarked. But before you begin, do some simple arithmetic: a few marks either way in one module will seldom make a significant difference to your overall result. Remember also that the world beyond the course of agents, producers, publishers, editors and (if you are both lucky and successful) critics and reviewers can be far harsher, more discouraging, more public and more arbitrary-seeming than being assessed in the microcosm of a university, where you will at least receive thoughtful feedback, and will have the support of your peers.

If, however, you remain dissatisfied, or continue to feel demoralised by your mark, ask first for an informal consultation with your tutor, and find out how his or her decision relates to the assessment criteria. If his or her reasons still remain unclear to you, and if your work has not been second-marked, you may be able to ask your tutor to pass it to a colleague, remembering that your work might be marked down as well as up. Even if your

original mark is confirmed, you nevertheless may be able to ask for your work to be referred to the External Examiner, beyond whom there is no further court of appeal (and remember that he or she might also mark your work down). All final, heavily credit-weighted pieces of writing such as portfolios are invariably second- or even third-marked within the department, and a sample (including all Distinctions, Fails and Borderlines) is sent to the External Examiner, then ratified at a University Examination Board. After that you will have no grounds for appeal against its decision unless you can prove a serious injustice or procedural irregularity.

Equal opportunities

All universities have an Equal Opportunities policy which is promulgated in student handbooks and on the university website. Such policies are designed to enable all students and staff to achieve their full potential unhindered by prejudices relating to race, gender, age, disability, religion and sexual orientation.

For writers, however, such matters are not always clear-cut, as can be seen from the threats and debates that raged around Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* (1988). Each student brings a different life experience to the course and, especially when submitting work in progress, may wish to test boundaries or even defy censorship. Such challenges need a sensitive and well-informed response from tutors and peers alike, and are best seen in the context of a national and international debate about contemporary writing. Parallel issues, such as the (sometimes necessary) use of character stereotypes, and the representation of those perceived as members of minorities, might be usefully discussed in early workshops, along with related matters such as the use of dialect and idiolect, non-standard speech patterns, and writing in a second language.

Study skills

If you have been out of education for some time, or have a disability (such as dyslexia) which might affect the way you are assessed, inform the admissions tutor before you start the course. If you wish, he or she will treat the information as confidential; or else notify appropriate members of staff, and arrange for you to receive the support you require (for example, study skills workshops, financial benefits such as the disabled student's allowance, access to photocopies and websites suitable for partially-sighted students, or extended deadline dates).

Plagiarism

As will be made clear in your student handbook, the term 'plagiarism' (sometimes known as 'academic impropriety') generally covers cheating, collusion or any other attempt to gain an unfair advantage in the way you are assessed. It includes not only verbatim copying (of the work of a peer or of a published author, online or in print, without acknowledgement), but also the close paraphrasing of another's work without acknowledgement, or passing off someone else's writing as your own, or appropriating another author's language or ideas.

Fortunately, most MA students are too busy finding and developing their individual 'voice' to copy the work of their fellow students, or of a published writer. Also, many courses require you to submit draft material with your creative writing, or to discuss your work in progress with their tutors, or in a workshop group – processes which make plagiarism almost impossible. But all good writers assimilate what they read or view, and the line between cribbing and what film buffs call an 'homage' (or deliberate and respectful quotation from a work which has influenced your own) is sometimes wavy.

You can see your course is a chance to learn about:

- The liberties the law allows you to take. For example, there is no copyright on titles or ideas. Furthermore, books are born out of other books, and many acclaimed novels, such as Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and Valerie Martin's *Mary Reilly* (1990) 'write back' to earlier work, out of copyright. Kathy Acker's *Great Expectations* (1982) quotes tracts of Dickens' novel of the same name.
- Straightforward ways of avoiding illegality in critical books and articles through the use of quotation marks, footnotes, endnotes and bibliographies.
- Intellectual copyright, and the (sometimes protracted and expensive) ways in which you can assert ownership of work you have published in book or magazine form, and even online, or that you have had screened or performed.

Assessing the assessors

Universities are obliged by HEFCE to monitor both tutors and students, and university methods and practices of assessment must conform to a nationwide Code of Practice for the assurance of what is called academic quality and standards. This code has been devised by the QAA, and QAA-trained teams of academics visit universities on a rota to review, among other procedures, how tutors design their courses and have them 'validated' or approved by university committees, the documentation available to students, the quality of feedback to students on their work, the principles, timing and range of assessment tasks, marking procedures, and assessment panels and boards. The QAA also monitors student performance and charts their progress during their course, and ensures that their work is on a par with that submitted on similar programmes of study.

As a twenty-first century student you will have more say in how your courses are run than students have ever had before – if only because in part you are perceived (by university managers and accountants, not by tutors) as a client and consumer. At the end of every module you will be given (or sent online) an evaluation form. Be altruistic, and fill it in: it will help your tutors to identify points of good and bad practice, and to amend and streamline the MA. The results will be collated and included in an annual report which will be forwarded to a monitoring committee and made available to QAA assessors.

You will also have elected student representatives with whom you can raise matters of concern informally during the semester, or in special end-of-semester sessions where no tutor is present. Or perhaps you are a representative yourself, and required to pass on student opinion to the course team, and then to a committee that monitors MA programmes and whose minutes are available for inspection by assessors.

Assessment criteria are not a gold standard but are – and should be – influenced by changes in the culture at large. Although, as a postgraduate, you might not have been directly involved in establishing them, you could, in the light of your experience of the MA, help to modify or expand them. By doing so, you will help to update and improve the course for students of the future, by which time you will be testing what you learnt against the judgement not of the university but of the world at large. Good luck.

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3

The Creative Writing MFA

Stephanie Vanderslice

The Creative Writing Master's of Fine Arts or MFA is an American phenomenon that originated at the University of Iowa in the 1930s, in part as an answer to the problem of geographic isolation that confronted writers working in the US, especially those without access to large cities. Still one of the country's most august graduate writing programs, the Iowa MFA has graduated a long list of luminary writers, including Flannery O'Connor, Philip Roth, Jane Smiley, and Richard Bausch, to name a few. Not surprisingly, many of these graduates fanned out across the country and formed their own programs in the image of their Alma Mater. As a result, today there are 109 MFA programs in the United States (Association of Writers and Writing Programs), a number which does not include the growing number of PhD programs, MA programs with a creative writing emphasis, and undergraduate writing programs.

The MFA emerged from two distinct traditions, the studio arts tradition from which it borrowed its moniker, and the English literature tradition, that is, it is usually (but not always) the English department that houses the program. Consequently, most programs reflect one or another tradition in their philosophies or are often an amalgam of both. The MFA degree is distinguished by being longer than the MA, with expanded credit hour requirements, such as a thesis, or substantial body of creative work and special coursework. Like its counterparts in the applied arts, then, the MFA is technically a *terminal* degree, requiring no other degree to qualify its holder to teach at the university level. However, in the US the terminal nature of this degree has been challenged by the rising number of doctoral programs in creative writing in the past two decades.

Understanding and evaluating MFA programs in the US is a recursive process, one that involves surveying the field, understanding the role that the MFA serves in literary culture, examining specific programs that interest you in great detail, as an educated consumer, if you will, and returning again and again to these important issues as you consider your options. But the first thing you must be educated about is yourself, that is, who you are as a writer. What are your writing needs? What kind of creative writing MFA program can best meet these needs?

Fortunately, in terms of the information available to you, there is no better time to be educating yourself. In fact, a great deal has changed since I meekly declared my interest in pursuing an MFA degree in the office of my undergraduate writing professor almost two decades ago. At her suggestion, I checked out the books of professors at several programs,

sent for a handful of brochures, worked hard on my portfolio, and hoped for the best. Largely thanks to the web, today's MFA aspirant has any number of information portals literally at her fingertips in divining the right program for her, portals we will discuss in detail as we examine the pursuit of the MFA in America. But first thing's first.

You, the writer

As I mentioned earlier, before you begin to consider an MFA in creative writing, you must first look deeply at who you are as a writer. Where do you see yourself going? How will an MFA help you move toward these goals? Are you currently frustrated at trying to fit writing in at the thin edges of your life and hoping that an MFA will finally give you a few years time to concentrate on your writing and a supportive culture to do it in? Do you currently have an unwieldy writing project you've been working on that you want to bring into a community of expert and dedicated writers, in the hopes of shaping it into something publishable? Do you feel – or have you been told by those who ought to know – that your writing potential is right on the cusp and a few years among like-minded souls, under the tutelage of experienced wordsmiths, may be what you need to hasten its development, not to mention perhaps giving you a few publishing and academic contacts? Do you hope to earn your living as a writer, journalist, or as a teacher of writing, or as a mix of the three, or do you consider yourself, like insurance executive Wallace Stevens, librarian Marianne Moore or physician William Carlos Williams, a writer who happens to pursue other professions to pay the bills? Do you see yourself spending one to three years focusing on writing and obtaining this degree in residency, or do you think a low residency MFA, which you work on throughout the year with a faculty tutor but which only requires intense ten-day to two-week campus residencies annually or semi-annually, might fit better with your current situation?

Understanding your answers to these questions will help you to determine, whether, how, and what type of MFA program may be useful for you. What's more, as if repeatedly holding garments up to your body in a dressing room, these are answers you will need to return to again and again in determining the right MFA fit for you.

Assessment

Before we go on to look in depth at how to analyse and evaluate the dizzying number of types of MFA programs that exist today, it will be helpful to get a general sense of how programs assess their own effectiveness as well as how student work, within these programs, is assessed.

Programs in general

Unlike in the UK, American MFA programs have no assessment organisations, like the Quality Assessment Association (QAA), to which they must answer. Although the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) is the primary literary arts advocacy organisation in higher education, it is neither a governing body nor an accrediting agency. As a result, MFA programs in the US have emerged quite independently, a state of affairs that has a long list of pros and cons which we don't have the time or space to devote to here. Nonetheless, the AWP does make advisory statements towards making MFA programs more universally useful to their participants, suggestions readily available in the AWP

Director's Guide, online at www.awpwriter.org One of these statements is the idea that MFA programs *should* participate in some form of self-assessment, although this assessment can be as varied as listing alumni publications, analysing retention rates or employing an exit survey and analysing – and ideally acting upon – the results.

A sample exit survey is also available in the Director's Guide at awpwriter.org and can not only shed light on the aims and effectiveness of an MFA program (Do they give such a poll? How do they use the results?) but also on the kinds of considerations one should take into account in exploring any program. Questions about quality of teaching and relevance of courses are all beneficial to ask of a program at the outset. We'll get to other pertinent questions later in this essay.

Student work in particular

In general, it is safe to say that in most US graduate writing programs, grades are not as important as the student work itself and how the professor's *response*, both formative and summative, can enhance improvement in the student's writing, the objective of any workshop. Moreover, entrance into most MFA programs is highly competitive; the student's motivation and dedication to success is usually a given in most courses. Consequently, then, neither the students nor the professors tend to pay much attention to grades; rather, the focus remains on the student's work, often intensely so. Assessment, then, may come more frequently in the form of extended oral or written response to the work at hand, usually in the workshop. With the exception of the final thesis, moreover, there are no second readers or external examiners involved. However, the workshop and the writing assessed within it often isn't the *only* work required of students in a graduate creative writing program. Indeed, assignments and coursework can vary as much as the programs themselves and are an important factor for prospective students to investigate. Some programs include traditional literature courses in the degree, taught by literature faculty and assessed by traditional means – analytical papers, essay exams and so forth (also read by one reader – the professor – unlike in the UK). Other programs offer reading courses in which students are taught to read literary models as writers, and are often led in this endeavour by creative writing faculty who may ask them to write critical analyses about how a particular author or literary work informs their own. Still others offer editing courses or internships at publishing houses or literary journals that also include reflective analyses of the student's experience. Finally, some programs require students to read self-directed reading lists of relevant authors and most require a thesis of some sort, a lengthy capstone creative work. Students work closely with faculty advisors on their theses in the production of a work of publishable quality. Usually, they also write a critical introduction to the work, bringing to bear what they have learned about literary history and culture to locate their work in a contemporary context. Such an introduction is also known more commonly in the rest of the English-speaking world as the exegesis. In exploring MFA programs, then, it is important that you try to find out about courses, typical assignments and how they are assessed, in determining those most suited to you.

Evaluation

Throughout this chapter it has been impossible *not* to touch on areas a student might consider in evaluating and selecting a prospective MFA program. In light of the current abundance of information available, moreover, such areas warrant further consideration. Once

you've thought hard about where you are in your development as a writer and how and what kind of MFA might help you, the first place you should turn is your local resources. If you are a current or recent undergraduate, most likely the creative writing faculty at your institution will be able to shed considerable light on different programs, since many of them will have experienced them first-hand. Meeting with these faculty members is a good place to begin, although keep in mind that they will have individual biases based on their own experiences.

Another resource worth checking into at the outset is the *AWP Official Guide to Writing Programs*, a detailed guide to creative writing programs that has long been considered a touchstone in the field. Recently, however, two additional books have been published which stand to add considerably to the discipline: Amy Holman's *An Insider's Guide to Creative Writing Programs: Choosing the Right MFA or MA Program, Colony, Residency, Grant or Fellowship* and Tom Kealey's *The Creative Writing MFA Handbook: A Guide for Prospective Graduate Students*. Both are seasoned writers and MFA alums and have spent considerable energy educating writers on professional issues; both have a web presence and Tom Kealy even has a blog (see Online resources) that discusses MFA programs extensively and even offers an advice column for prospective students. Reading the archived questions and answers for this column is an education in itself. At any rate, both books provide detailed, long-overdue guides to graduate study in creative writing.

Talking with mentors and arming yourself with information from available guides should help you to begin to narrow your choices to the MFA programs that will best suit you. Once you're ready to focus your search, it's time to begin using the internet to its fullest advantage. Most if not all MFA programs have websites that provide a window into their institutions and you should mine these sites as much as possible. While the majority of programs offer basic information on faculty and coursework as well as program philosophy, some also offer course syllabi, information on student and alumni publications and even online student newsletters and discussion boards. All of these can be enlightening for prospective students. In fact, the more information a program provides on its website, the more that you can infer that it is an open, student-centered place.

In addition to formal websites, the web also has much to offer prospective creative writing graduate students in terms of unofficial information. In addition to Tom Kealey's blog, many current MFA students have blogs that can shed some – albeit highly subjective – light on the student experience at various programs. Moreover, simply searching the names of faculty on the program and learning about their work and their philosophies on writing and teaching, through lists of publications you can pursue, and interviews you can read, will add to the arsenal of information that can help you decide on the suitability of a program.

Much has been made of the global changes in publishing that have made it increasingly difficult for most writers to make a living solely via their writing. If you are looking at the MFA as a career step, then, it is important to consider the extent to which the program is realistic about what it can offer students. Is it a program that purports to offer only space and time to write as well as expert teaching, without raising student expectations about publishing or landing a plum job in academia without significant book publication? Or is it one designed to provide students with experiences which can render them better qualified to take on other jobs in teaching, publishing or arts administration in order to support their writing? In addition, you might consider the size of the program (an entering class of five versus twenty-five), and the character of the students (traditional-aged, residing near campus, commuting students who have other jobs or careers) when examining a particular

program. For example, a program admitting a small number of students, though perhaps more competitive, *might* be more committed to mentoring those students and providing individual attention than one with a significantly larger student body. Moreover, a program that caters to commuting students who often work in other careers may be less focused on job opportunities for students and more intensely focused on the literary work alone.

In making such an important decision, it is also wise to look at available funding for graduate study. In the US, there are often many scholarship options available for qualified students. In addition to the small number of fellowships (no-strings attached scholarships) available which are often intensely competitive, many programs often offer teaching assistantships in which students either team-teach large courses with mentoring faculty or solely teach the first-year composition course common in American universities. Not only do these assistantships offer a stipend and tuition remission, they also provide students with an opportunity to pick up important teaching skills that can help them support their writing with part-time, adjunct positions.

Finally, in researching an MFA, it is also important to try to gauge the program's commitment to mentoring students and helping them to navigate the publishing world and to maintain a sustainable writing practice after the program is over. This can be accomplished through interviews with program faculty and administrators as well as students, whose contact information may be available via the website or contacting the program itself. Armed with this array of information, as well as with a clear understanding of how an MFA program can meet your needs as a writer, you will be able to make a highly-informed decision on the program that is right for you, a decision that is the first step in successful MFA – and, subsequently, writing – careers.

Online resources

www.awpwriter.org The website for the Association of Writers and Writing Programs, which offers abundance of information on writing and MFA programs, including discussion boards and information on the annual conference.

http://creative-writing-mfa-handbook.blogspot.com Tom Kealey's blogsite.

www.pw.org The website for Poet's and Writer's magazine, an excellent source of information on the writing scene in America, which includes MFA programs.

www.amyspublishingnotebook.blogspot.com, www.amyholman.com, Amy Holman's website and blog.

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4

Creative Writing and Critical Theory

Lauri Ramey

Background on the 'creative' versus 'critical' opposition

Slightly more than one hundred years ago, it was arguable that there was such a field as literary study. Language was a proper field of study, but some late nineteenth-century figures including James Russell Lowell, Thomas H. Hunt and Calvin Thomas began to argue that if philology were to be made practical, it could be applied usefully to literature. The most frequent rationales for the academic study of literature were that poems, novels, essays and plays often showed the greatest skill in the use of language; their mastery was a valuable intellectual and moral exercise in putting one's knowledge of languages to work; and properly chosen texts could exemplify the most admirable human traits and aspirations. Lowell provided this metaphor in 1889: instead of teaching 'purely the linguistic side of things', language study should lead to

> something better. And that something better is Literature. The blossoms of language have certainly as much value as its roots, for if the roots secrete food and thereby transmit life to the plant, yet the joyous consummation of that life is in the blossoms, which alone bear the seeds that distribute and renew it in other growths. Exercise is good for the muscles of the mind and to keep it well in hand for work, but the true end of Culture is to give it play, a thing quite as needful. (Lowell 1889: 1737)

The two aspects of literary study are harmoniously connected in Lowell's vision of roots representing the literary and linguistic past and blossoms as the creation of new writing. But his metaphor points ahead to precisely the pedagogical and intellectual schism that later arose in the post-philology development of literature and creative writing in the drive for connoisseurship combined with the pragmatics of inspiring new literature. The bifurcation of the field of literary studies was inherent from its inception. For example, when Stanford University was founded in the 1890s, two pre-eminent scholars were hired for its newly-formed department of English: Ewald Flugel, trained as a philologist in Leipzig in the scientific study of language; and Melville Best Anderson from Iowa, a poetry specialist who viewed literature as a source of moral uplift (Carnochan 2000: 1958–9).

Creative writing as an academic subject developed at approximately the same time as English, and out of the same desire, which was to rectify the 'impracticality' of philol-

ogy. In the US, the first classes in creative writing were taught at Harvard College by Barrett Wendell in the 1880s, whose English 12 class was designed 'to turn out men with something like a professional command of the art in which to practice' (Adams 1993: 52, quoted by Lim 2003: 154). The class stressed 'practice, aesthetics, personal observation and creativity' as opposed to the 'theory, history, tradition and literary conservation' taken as the concerns of newly developing departments of English (Fenza 2000: 15). Creative writing had become institutionalised within the academy by the 1920s (Lim 2003: 155). By the 1940s, postgraduate degrees in creative writing were offered by a number of American universities, including Johns Hopkins University, University of Denver, University of Iowa and Stanford University. Several recent studies of the growth and development of creative writing and its pedagogy (see Lim, Myers, Dawson and Fenza 2000 and 2002) offer varying perspectives on whether the field was intended more as a subjective and personal corrective to the rigid linguistic and historical orientation of philology (Myers 1996: 3), or a means of 'giving play' to Culture by developing professional writers.

Some critics suggest a correlation between the development of creative writing and intellectual movements such as New Humanism, Progressive Education and New Criticism, and later the Sputnik-era concern with educational reform, including widespread views by the mid-to late-twentieth century that 'the teaching of English was "a disaster area"' (Lopate 1979: 15; see also Kohl 1976). Views that literary studies had experienced a loss of identity were exacerbated by the growing dominance of critical theory, seen by many as shifting the field's focus on literature as an inherently valuable object of attention to literature as a means of gaining insight into other academic fields such as psychology, sociology, history and cultural studies.[1] Others have suggested that part of creative writing's attraction and popularity was precisely its lack of reliance on theory and pragmatic focus on the production of new literature. Robie Macauley, a visiting lecturer at the University of Iowa in the 1940s, dismisses suggestions that theory exerted any kind of influence on the Iowa Writers' Workshop and Paul Engle, who became its director in 1941:

> The idea of Paul, like some grand Teutonic professor, initiating anybody into the grand theory is ludicrous. Paul was a practical critic pure and simple . . . Andrew Lytle, of course, knew all the N.C. [New Critical] writing, but it didn't affect him a great deal – and he certainly didn't propound it in teaching during his short stint in Iowa . . . Of course the New Criticism was talked about some (as the reigning critical theory) and most people had read Brooks and Warren but (as far as I can remember) none of us tried to apply it – the N.C. – to writing fiction in any specific way. (Correspondence to Sarah Fodor, 22 May 1991, used by the recipient's permission)

Other programs saw creative writing as a valuable adjunct to literary studies so long as the field incorporated historical knowledge and critical rigour into the practice of generating new writing. Jean McGarry's 'A brief history of the writing seminars at Johns Hopkins University' explains that in 1947, the poet Elliott Coleman 'was assigned the task of founding a department, within the humanities, to train young poets and fiction writers in a context of academic rigour appropriate to Hopkins. How the study and craft of writing could be blended into a traditional liberal-arts program was part of Coleman's experiment'. Coleman created a program which produced early graduates (including poet Karl Shapiro and novelist John Barth) who would 'do honor, nonetheless, to their strong studies in English and French literature, aesthetics, linguistics, history'. Stress on interdisciplinarity,

practicality and scholarship has continued as the hallmark of Johns Hopkins's program. McGarry describes John Irwin, who became director in 1977, as 'the very fulfilment of the Coleman mandate, combining, in his work, meticulous scholarship, heady criticism and (on the side) the practice of poetry', as he hired other 'scholar-writers' to maintain 'the intellectual and aesthetic rigor of the program' which encourages experimentalism, innovation, varied styles and 'brainy ferment about traditions and genres' (McGarry 2005).

Critical theory and creative writing in higher education today

As D. G. Myers points out, the teaching of writing at mid-twentieth century – whether creative or academic – was still 'an experiment in education' (Myers 1996: 3), a concept which continues to figure importantly in the description of Johns Hopkins's Writing Seminars and some other creative writing programs, whilst the term 'experimentalism' rarely appears in descriptions of English programs. This pivotal word's absence and presence in these two contexts suggests that the qualities entailed in experimentation – such as exploration, unpredictability, uncertainty of outcome, and innovation – which still characterise self-descriptions of many creative writing programs may partly explain the split between these two approaches to literature if they are considered to be mutually exclusive. For example, on the website of the MFA program in creative writing at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, Alex Shakar offers his thoughts on teaching, specifically the benefits of the writers' workshop as the central creative writing pedagogical tool:

> What must be avoided is an atmosphere in which the out-of-the ordinary is castigated while the reflexive and habitual go unquestioned. I try to make the writing workshop a place where aspiring artists feel safe taking risks, both stylistic and emotional, with their works-in-progress. If this kind of freedom is encouraged, the workshop can really be a workshop in the best sense of the word: a smithy of techniques, a laboratory of experimentation, and a forum of ideas. (Shakar 2005)

In contrast, the MA program in English at the same university stresses research, theoretical fields in which to specialise, interdisciplinary study, teaching experience, financial support and affordability, as well as the professional benefit – whether in English or another field – of obtaining this degree. Foremost, the MA in English 'is designed to provide students with the training in research and teaching that they need to obtain academic jobs' (University of Illinois 2006). In addition to what is stated in Illinois's English program description, words are absent of the type used by Shakar which suggest poesis in the classical sense of doing or making, such as 'smithy' and 'laboratory'. Processual terms referring to uncertain outcomes such as 'risks', 'freedom' and 'experimentation' have been replaced by references to concrete fields of knowledge and employability. Rhetoric similar to Shakar's is characteristic of many postgraduate creative writing programs, although goals and methods discussed in these terms would be highly unconventional for English programs. Equally noteworthy is Shakar's omission of techniques other than the workshop or mention of critical skills, precise informational content and literary history.

This case in point highlights the differing opinions on the identities of literary studies and creative writing, as well as the relationship between these fields. Consider Green's description of creative writing as 'literary study's wayward cousin' (Green 2003: 47), Marcelle Freiman's use of postcolonial theory to frame creative writing as a marginalised subject in relation to the dominant discourse of English (Freiman 2001: 1), Fenza's con-