A Companion to
Creative Writing

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A COMPANION TO

CREATIVE WRITING

EDITED BY

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Foreword by Sir Andrew Motion

When I began teaching Creative Writing to M.A. students a little under 20 years ago, the whole business still had a lot of enemies this side of the Atlantic. It wasn't just that the phrase sounded ugly and awkward – though that didn't help. It was more to do with the commonly held view that good writing couldn't be taught. Theatre, yes. Ballet, yes. Fine Arts, yes. There were distinguished Schools for such things, and everyone knew they did good work. But writing? Wasn't that an American idea? Didn't good writing happen regardless of teaching (and usually in an attic)? Wasn't it . . . well, a bit like cheating? A bit like taking steroids?

Thanks to the efforts of teachers like Malcolm Bradbury at East Anglia and David Craig at Lancaster, to the success of graduates like Ian McEwan and Kasuo Ishiguro, and to broad educational and cultural shifts in the country as a whole (some of which are explored in the following pages), it's rare to find much disparagement of Creative Writing courses these days. The term itself still gets a bit of flack. And there's a concern that courses might somehow grind the writing of all students everywhere into roughly similar shapes and idioms. But by and large the teaching is seen as a force for good. As a fruitful way of allowing individuals to test and investigate themselves; as a way of increasing the spread of good reading; and as a means of increasing the stock of good books in the world.

The essays collected in this book give a useful account of these changes and achievements. More important still, they contribute to the ideas and ideals which inform the teaching of Creative Writing as well as its practice. If their focus was fixed entirely on theoretical matters, they would be welcome. Because they are also concerned with the experience of writing, they are valuable. They comprise a companionable *Companion*.

Introduction

Graeme Harper

This book is a "companion" to creative writing, and its title immediately brings to mind that the most common *companion* for any working creative writer is themselves. Of course, ours is not the only art that involves an individual so often working on their own and frequently according to their personal sense of creative practice. And yet, the notion of being an art of individual making combined with a form of communication relying almost entirely on the creative use of words – that is distinctive! This prompts the idea that creative writing is a very distinctive activity, distinctive in itself and distinctive as an art form. But is it?

We need to be wary of generalizations. Logic might appear to quickly confirm that creative writing is not the art of the fine artist's studio, where words are infrequently the focus, and where space and time might be shared with other artists. Creative writing has also not often been the art of the actor's theater where, even if there is not the need of additional actors the performance relies on so many other human beings with so many other roles that the artist's individuality is more a capturing of a section of that art within a shared space and a shared time. Also, in the public distribution of completed works emerging from the activities of creative writers we have historically seen a set of production and distribution practices that are not very like those in filmmaking or television, and the relationship between maker and receiver of works of creative writing has not often been very like that seen in the fields of design or architecture.

Or is none of this completely true? After all, where do we truly draw distinctions? Can't a creative writer's working environment be sometimes exactly like a fine artist's

studio, with much not manifest in words but occurring in the creative writer's thoughts, memories and emotions, that only afterward (and only potentially) become the fodder for our art of words? Equally, do all creative writers have a pristine, singular space of their own in which to work? Similarly, don't actors sometimes so strongly define a role that all else operates primarily as support for their individual art? Don't many musicians compose their works, and is the mainstream distribution of these works not unlike, say, the mainstream distribution of a novel or a collection of poems? Isn't a creative writer a little like an architect in their creative exploration of structure, form, and function? Don't some creative writers work to a "design brief" provided by someone else – a publisher or theater company, say? Or isn't creative writing just a little like filmmaking, in that we have a general sense of an audience but . . . The debate could continue!

In order to produce a companion volume to creative writing we need to know what makes creative writing something that can be discussed in a specific way. To do that we need to begin at the point where creative writing happens, and to see then how it manifests itself in certain occupational, societal, and cultural ways in our wider world. Not only do we need to consider what is distinctive about creative writing within the context of human practices, but also whether it is distinctive within the practices and outcomes of the arts. There are a number of important premises that therefore underpin this companion.

Because creative writing is a highly individualized practice, the reader of this book will inevitably bring to it their personal sense of the actions, understandings, and outcomes in creative writing. That is this book's first premise.

Even if you are undertaking your creative writing in a relatively structured, formal educational setting you will have your personal set of ideas and ideals, skills and knowledge, and the activities of creative writing will strongly bring your uniqueness into play. Fortunately, and because of this individualism, there is no one way to understand creative writing and there is no one way to develop your creative writing. So recognizing and harnessing how you think, feel and act in writing is often an important clue to developing further as a creative writer.

It is assumed here that it is the *undertaking* of creative writing in which you are most interested. However, you might also have considerable admiration for finished works of creative writing (most often referred to by such very well-known names as "novel," "poem," "screenplay," and so on). Those completed works might indeed be an important reason a creative writer begins writing. They might inspire a writer, provide wonderful (or sometimes, just so usefully, *not so* wonderful) models, suggest solutions to creative writing problems, give some grounding in the creative writing of the past and in what a creative writer might seek to achieve in the future. But they are *not* in essence creative writing. They *are* most certainly evidence of creative writing having happened; however, they are after the *event* of creative writing, after the action. As a companion to creative writing, this book thus proceeds on the premise that creative writing is an event or series of events in which someone (i.e. the creative writer) does something informed by their knowledge and by their skills. In other words,

creative writing is not static, creative writing is actions, and those actions produce a range of results.

It is often said that creative writers need to be good readers. Common sense tells us this must be true, otherwise how else could we come to experience the things creative writers create and the other evidence their activities leave behind? What a creative writer reads and why they read it are open to more detailed consideration. One thing seems certain: that a creative writer must read, and explore through reading what other writers have released into our world. In addition, however, common sense also tells us that stopping at those completed and distributed works will not get us as close to what creative writers have been doing as we might wish to be. Better understanding means embracing the possibilities informed by a wider range of reading. For a creative writer to be a "good reader" must in this sense mean that they are pursuing reading that informs their actions and understandings as a creative writer (and there is obviously an intention here that this companion will be one of those things pursued!).

Thoughts evolve further toward what a creative writer being a "good reader" might mean in pragmatic terms. Beyond encountering final works of creative writers, being a good reader of writers' manuscripts and diaries might be exceedingly useful to a creative writer; after all, these clearly contain evidence of writerly creating. Being a good reader of newly released works within the context of older works might also assist. Knowledge gained through considering these comparatively comes to mind, making observations about how one creative writer or another, one creative genre or another, has changed over time. A creative writer might also be helped by being a good reader of varieties of visual material – for example, by being a reader of another writer's doodles on the edges of their manuscripts, their marginalia, by being a good reader of photographs of writers' rooms or libraries, a reader of the visual art or moving images of other creative writers. Much might be discovered in these kinds of reading, where the text to be read is that of a writerly habitat, of our writerly habitation, the engagement with and creation of spaces and times for creative writing.

This all might be a different version of "creative writers must be good readers" than that encountered by some students in creative writing workshops over recent years. If that is so then that is a good thing, given that as a companion to creative writing this book should be informed by newly emerging ideas about creative writing. It should aim to unearth more about creative writing than we have previously unearthed, and one of the aspects of doing this is to consider how creative writers read.

To finish this point, creative writers should also be good readers of human beings, of their actions, their expressions, their intentions. If nothing else, attempting to be a good reader of the lives and actions and attitudes of human beings must surely inform the very best creative writing, and the very best results of our actions as creative writers. Plainly, it is the premise here that a narrow sense of reading is not useful for a creative writer and might even be as harmful as not reading at all.

Other ideas also played key roles in the formation of the idea for this book and, later, in its evolution. Not all of these might have been discussed regularly in creative writing workshops, and it is with this in mind that they are mentioned here.

This book proceeds on the basis that in any of the arts creative understanding and critical understanding are intimately entwined and that dealing with one without consideration of its partner is to the detriment of our knowledge – in this case, to the detriment of creative writing and knowledge about creative writing. Knowledge is complex, and ways of moving our human knowledge forward have been the subject of thousands of years of contemplation, struggle, and excitement. Knowledge in creative writing is doubly difficult to speak about because, as our primary art form using words, creative writing must differentiate itself from other word realms while at the same time we acknowledge that it uses tools used by many other people for many more common, even "uncreative" purposes.

It could be suggested that all art forms must negotiate similar issues – issues about what constitutes the "creative" over what might be called the merely functional, and what constitutes other more common contemporary uses of image, voice, design, and so forth – but it is words that share a commonality across most forms of human communication and it is words that a creative writer must largely use to make art. So one defining notion in this book is that creative writing can be described as *an art of making the extraordinary and artistic from the functional and commonplace*.

In this book too the suggestion is that creative writing *can* be taught. Let me get that statement out in the open. My personal belief in this, as the editor of this book, is probably already obvious. The argument for the validity of such a statement goes like this: teaching and learning involve an exchange of knowledge and understanding and there is absolutely nothing in the human practice we call creative writing that suggests such an exchange cannot be accomplished in this particular field of human endeavor.

Of course, that is not to say that someone can be taught to be a *great* creative writer, a *well-known* creative writer; or that someone can be taught to write in ways, and about things, that are appealing to the contemporary publishing or performance industries – or that everyone can be taught to write creatively in the same length of time or in the same way. It is purely to say that there is *nothing* in the makeup of the human activity called creative writing that prevents it being taught. Therefore, there is no reason for anyone to declare that creative writers can only be "guided," "encouraged," or "mentored," or to use any of the other weasel words (as such indirect expressions have sometimes been called) that have been occasionally used to avoid using the word *taught*. All these words have positive, non-weaseling meanings and applications, but creative writing can also benefit from learning and teaching, so we should not avoid this responsibility or underplay the potential in this statement and this intention.

Finally, this book proceeds on the basis that not everything that can be learnt about creative writing involves only practical skills. Yes, creative writing involves human action, so practical activities are a big part of it. But creative writing is more than

practical skills, so a book that simply looks at *how to* undertake creative writing is going to provide only a portion of the knowledge needed to advance our understanding, and it is going to overweight the discussion to the point where creative writing loses key elements of its identity and a creative writer is disempowered by not being able to draw on their full range of knowledge and experience. To develop understanding that has practical depth as well as application, that provides a basis on which to build further knowledge, and that gives us a truthful picture of the human activity of creative writing we need to go beyond *how to*. Going further, or deeper, than this we find that critical knowledge and creative knowledge form a network or web of connections and that what we might lack in one area, at any one time, can be contrasted with an abundance of understanding in another.

   "Self-knowledge" is perhaps one way to describe the goal that a further and deeper understanding of creative writing is endeavoring to achieve – knowing more about how to connect our individualized knowledge and the practice of creative writing. But this suggests a more remedial need than the description intends. "Individual knowledge" is probably a better phrase, individual knowledge in relation to the shared human activity that is creative writing. Another way of describing the aim might be to say that "creative writing involves informed action." That description gives a useful focus to how the activities of creative writing are at the center and the knowledge that informs them can work to improve our writerly activities – whether when we're collecting material for use in one project or another, reading, drafting in the first instance, revising, editing, undertaking one or more projects at the same time as dealing with our day-to-day lives.

   Contributing to the development of "informed action" in creative writing is one key goal of this companion. However, that immediately begs the question of what kind of information might best be included. In other words, action informed by what? It will quickly be apparent how this question has been answered.

   First, this companion proceeds on the basis that informed action is action informed *by* action. This is not as tautological as it first appears! Simply, one-third of the book is entirely devoted to exploring the actions of creative writing and creative writers, to looking at the writing of particular genres, and to focusing on the actions associated with these areas. As you can imagine, this is not approached as if somehow such activities leave aside many forms of critical understanding. Quite the opposite! Discovery through action is one method of strengthening critical awareness. In this opening section the writers have very much been asked to talk about the act of creative writing, the undertaking.

   Secondly, this book considers how creative writing has formed, influenced, or engaged with forms of what might be called "professional" activity. In some senses, this means creative writing manifesting itself as a profession, with undertakings and outcomes indicative of a profession. So, for example, the evolution of the role of "the editor" or historical aspects of book making and of bookselling, or the professionalization of the role of the critic. All are aspects that could be rightly labeled as professional in nature. However, this raises the question of whether creative writing can be an

occupation rather than a profession. That is, whether it can be something undertaken, but not undertaken as part of employment or as a career. Most certainly this is the case! So the word "profession" is also used more widely here to indicate something having specialized knowledge, something that can involve continuing interest and exploration, even if it is not what you do for a living.

Thirdly, creative writing is considered in this companion in the context of society and the world. Culture, politics, place, the self, and aspects of cultural heritage and education are all broached here. The idea behind this final section of the book was to encourage the writers to explore the phenomenon whereby creative writing is both from and about each individual and that it also finds its way out into wider society – not in terms of how it finds its way there but in terms of some aspects of what happens around it, out in the world.

There are, thus, three parts in *A Companion to Creative Writing* grouped around (a) action and the undertaking of creative writing, (b) creative writing as a profession and the manifestations of specialized knowledge, and (c) creative writing, culture and society. This arrangement aims to provide some marshaling of ideas, but not to suggest divisions. You'll notice, for example, that explorations of education in and around creative writing occur in two of the parts, that there is work on other arts in the part devoted to writerly action, when this could easily have been included in the part devoted to culture, and that the part focusing on the occupation or profession related to creative writing contains a chapter on translating that is as much about action and undertaking as anything included in the first part of the book. All this is intentional.

The writers in *A Companion to Creative Writing* were encouraged to explore as they wished to explore, and the chapters therefore reflect individual expertise, considerable personal experience, and many choices made entirely by the writers themselves. Some indication was given, of course, of where these chapters would sit within the book, and the book's overall intention was briefly explained. It should probably be said, also, that not every contributor to this Companion would consider themselves to be a creative writer. Some, indeed, are experts in what are often called cognate fields; that is, fields that are causally connected with creative writing or that have some shared characteristics, or that have logical connections: fields such as publishing, editing, literary studies, language, cultural analysis, psychology, and arts development. In that respect, I'd return to the note on reading and on informed action. Creative writers are often considerably impacted upon by activities beyond their own practice but connected to it. Thus, the contributors here include those for whom creative writing action is an immediate and personal activity, and those for whom creative writing somehow informs their work, just as their work informs creative writing.

Part I
Creative Writing

1

The Architecture of Story

Lorraine M. López

Many writers compare stories to dreams, and though this analogy is especially apt, it is nevertheless certainly worth revisiting. Like dreams, stories enable people to synthesize lived experiences, longings, and emotions, distilling the intensity of these through symbolic representation. Also, stories that are well told work the magic of dream by immersing readers in the fiction so effectively that this imagined space, its objects, and inhabitants feel convincing and true to life. But unlike dreams, which happen in spontaneous ways, fictional narratives are deliberately fashioned. With inspiration from Alice Munro's short story "Post and Beam," wherein a historic house provides the central metaphor for a character who discovers her life has been erected upon a faulty foundation of compromise and sublimation of self, perhaps composing story is more like constructing a dwelling than experiencing a dream. In fact, creating a narrative shares much in common with building a home with many rooms, closets and cupboards to intrigue and astonish both inhabitants and guests.

Stories, while inspired by dreams, are the products of an intentional process of many steps – from blueprinting to final touch-up – and like houses, well-constructed stories invite readers to live and breathe within their walls, traveling from room to room, or scene to scene, as they inhabit and experience, along with the characters, their distinctive architecture. Similar to a designed structure, story imposes a certain vision and order on what is initially imagined. In so doing, fictional narratives suggest that particular patterns define what we experience, know, and dream about, and that we can interpret these patterns meaningfully. Early storytelling, such as mythology, folktales or biblical stories, often functioned as proto-science to explain

natural phenomena – such as the genesis of life or arrangement of stars in the sky – imaginatively and memorably. Storytelling also worked as a nascent philosophical framework, wherein cultures could speculate about the meaning of existence as well as work through ethical dilemmas by deploying imaginary characters and situations to enact and resolve these. Additionally, cultural values and historic occurrences have been preserved through narratives. Furthermore, stories offer hope by insisting that human beings possess sufficient agency to interact significantly with destiny – whether by altering its course or by comprehending it in illuminating and life-changing ways. Beyond this, storytelling provides entertainment, offering some shelter against the hardship and monotony entailed in daily living both in the past and now.

The need to tell stories is deeply embedded in our collective psyche and enmeshed with linguistic systems that generate and acquire language. Just as we process the world by telling stories, we produce knowledge through engagement with imagined lives. Furthermore, stories inscribe their tellers into larger cultural and historic narratives, an assertive act that often gives voice and agency to the marginalized and vulnerable. Writers sometimes construct stories in order to synthesize and comprehend personal experiences, fantasies, and emotions in an indirect and symbolic way. Fictional stories simultaneously provide both a protected space and a window view for writers and readers to examine what is challenging – even threatening – to contemplate, let alone process through firsthand experience. Whatever the specific impetus for fictional narratives, the drive to create stories is universal, while the methods of storytelling, just like the styles of building homes, have changed with the passage of time and vary from culture to culture. For instance, early fictional narratives in the English language tended toward great sweeping epics rendered from an omniscient perspective, whereas contemporary fiction focuses more on personal drama, often filtered through a limited and controlled point of view. Despite such changes, the traits that identify story have remained more or less recognizable over time.

To Build a Story

In fictional stories, a character or protagonist is beset by a particular problem that occurs because of some interference in attaining a particular objective. The narrative then traces an uphill trajectory as the character pursues satisfaction of this goal, despite various obstacles. The incline traversed crests at a moment of self-defining choice. Generally speaking, this is the site where the protagonist must decide whether to fulfill or sacrifice the driving desire, but it can also be the juncture at which the character discovers an underlying truth about the self and the object of longing. The resultant crisis moment forces choice that is followed by either change or recognition. Whatever the main character decides results in profound and fundamental transformation, usually signified by an action or a resonant image that clearly demonstrates to the reader how things will be profoundly altered for – or at least perceived differently by – the character in the aftermath of such crisis.

Exposition, inciting incident, rising action, climax, and resolution are terms familiar to most students of fiction writing as they describe the progression summarized in the previous paragraph. A nineteenth-century German novelist, Gustav Freytag, famously charted this trajectory, forming a triangular shape. Exposition and inciting incident introduce the character and situation, the longing, as well as the impediment complicating satisfaction of such yearning. Rising action inscribes that upward movement made by the protagonist toward his or her goal. Climax, marking the apex point, is the crisis moment, wherein the self-defining choice occurs. Falling action and resolution, or denouement, reveal the change or illumination that results from the decision made at the climax. While story form entertains seemingly endless variations, it is recognizable for these features to readers across a broad spectrum. Even children can perceive when storytelling falls short of form, and many will complain about narratives in which "nothing happens."

But what we know as readers, we sometimes forget as writers. Emerging writers tend to rely on autobiographical material to compose their first narratives, and often they have insufficient distance from their experiences to shape this material meaningfully, or else they are unwilling or incapable of adapting the facts of what happened to allow for what could have occurred. Such narratives can have the same effect on a reader that a windbag conversationalist has on even the most avid listener. *And then this happened and this happened and this happened*, the windbag drones on, while the expectant look quickly withers on the listener's face. Sophisticated storytellers know that personal experiences, if used at all, must be significantly mediated for successful retelling as story. They understand that lived experiences are not usually structured as narratives and that restricting stories to the facts of what transpired curtails imaginative possibilities. Successful stories are usually produced from three sources: memory, imagination, and inspiration from other works of literature. With these raw materials, writers structure stories so that they provide the trajectory – in one way or another – that defines them as fictional narratives.

Drafting the Blueprint: Prewriting

Once a person develops the desire to write stories, he or she must embark on a rather long and repetitive process that begins with the flash of a sustainable idea. People frequently have ideas for creating narratives, and these occur anywhere and at any time. Imagine sitting in a rural clinic's anteroom, waiting to see a doctor, and glancing about at the various occupants of this room: a rude child, his oblivious mother, an elderly man feigning sleep, a middle-aged woman of working-class background, a silent and brooding farmer, and that farmer's judgmental and superior wife who – affronted by the incivility of the others – stands while her injured husband claims the last available seat. Soon enough, and if one observes closely, a discernible dynamic among such characters emerges, and with these ingredients, a spark for story can be ignited. This may well have been the case for Flannery O'Connor, as suggested by the

opening of her well-known and often anthologized short story titled "Revelation." O'Connor, who lived in the rural South and suffered from lupus, no doubt spent considerable time in waiting rooms similar to the one she describes in "Revelation," and there she may have gazed upon people who inspired the characters she created for this story. Such inspiration likely provoked the curiosity that O'Connor managed to sustain throughout the long process of drafting her story.

Students of writing sometimes complain of having too many ideas and not knowing which to pursue. Sustainability is an effective litmus test for ideation in fiction writing, and ideas will often self-select by persisting in the writer's thoughts and refusing to go away. But writers can wear out their curiosity for even the most worthy and time-resistant of ideas. They diminish the psychic energy for pursuing flashes of inspiration by discussing these too often with others, verbally telling and retelling the story they ought to be committing to paper. Writing instructors become wary of students who invest too much time and energy at this stage of prewriting, and many experienced writers will abstain from discussing stories they intend to write in order to preserve the drive to explore their inspiration.

Another problem related to expending too much time and energy in the inception and planning stage of developing a story results from overthinking the idea, so the story is fully mapped in the writer's mind before the first paragraph is drafted. This can result in a predictable and unsurprising story, rather than the journey of discovery that it should be for both writer and reader. Unfortunately, professional writers – especially when applying for grants or residencies – are often required not only to explain the writing projects they intend to develop, but also often to explicate themes that will emerge in such work. For most fiction writers, this kind of directive is akin to demanding a person provide interpretation for a dream that he or she has not yet had, or – in keeping with the building analogy – insisting on a structural inspection before the blueprints have been drawn.

Thematic considerations, by and large, are not the storyteller's concern when conceiving of and even when composing the work. Just as interpretation cannot occur before a dream has been experienced, theme should not emerge until after the story has been fully drafted. Nevertheless, many inexperienced fiction writers begin with thematic abstractions, rather than character or image, and this inverted process often dooms the narrative to work as a soapbox or pulpit from which the writer can espouse various beliefs and theories. As one might expect, the end result is usually about as exciting as a sermon or a speech. Stories are an art form, and art that serves a particular ideology or agenda risks becoming propaganda. Even so, emerging writers are often filled to bursting with many deeply felt principles. Such writers long to convince others of their beliefs, but for various reasons, ranging from the unpopularity of the form to the effort entailed in properly researching and presenting rhetorical argument, they eschew drafting philosophic essays. Mistakenly, they may believe writing creatively, and packaging abstract theories about life as fiction, is an easier way to persuade readers of their viewpoints.

Though the phrase "creative writing" may suggest that anything goes, drafting fictional narratives, like erecting any structure, involves protracted and deliberate effort. Many formal constraints – such as the aforementioned shaping of story – must be negotiated in producing a recognizable work of fiction. However, freedom to explore and experiment occurs for most writers at the outset of drafting a story. In prewriting, the writer ought to feel uninhibited and unconstrained by convention. Free writing – committing a random jumble or free association of words to paper – is sometimes a useful strategy for getting started on a fictional narrative. Some writers doodle, diagram, or list random-seeming items. Others may prefer prewriting strategies that appear more organized and intentional, such as outlining, plotting scenes, or making checklists of events they plan to include in their narratives. Again, with more involved planning strategies, writers should avoid investing so much creative energy in the blueprinting phase that they have little in reserve for completing the project.

One strategy that can be especially helpful is a mnemonic map, or a progression of concrete objects to guide the writer through the story, much in the way remembered images allow the dreamer to reconstruct a dream. Though it may appear that generating items for such a map is a somewhat random activity, usually the objects that surface in conscious thought are the striking images that writers remember experiencing or imagining. Like elements of dream, these "things" tend to embed themselves in the writer's memory because they have symbolic value. Often writers are unaware of what these objects mean, and this is optimal since understanding a symbol too well and deploying it too deliberately compromises its efficacy. When rendered in fiction, such items enable the writer to penetrate the depths of the affective filter – bypassing the psychological constraints that prevent writers from tapping into the well of imagination – and to dive deeply into the unconscious, developing story in intuitive and imagistic ways, thereby achieving outcomes that often surprise and delight.

Such objects can also anchor the narrative to the physical world in a recognizable and convincing way. During the course of a day or week or even a month, we collect a vast array of images and most of these are forgotten over time or pushed from the forefront of consciousness by new impressions. Only a few especially tenacious mind pictures remain to provoke the imagination and cause enduring wonderment. William Faulkner claimed the sight of a child wearing muddy drawers while climbing out of a window triggered *The Sound and the Fury*. It is unlikely that Faulkner took the time to deconstruct and analyze that image; instead, he probably just commenced writing the novel.

More often than not, expending too much effort in prewriting is an avoidance technique. Drafting a story can be a daunting, even terrifying experience. Many writers complain of feeling intimidated by the blank page, and some recoil from it altogether when they suffer from writer's block. The fear that underpins such a blockage usually emanates from perfectionism, reflecting dread of committing errors or producing a narrative that does not align with an original and idealized vision of the

work. Writer's block is a serious impediment that can cause and be caused by stress, or even depression. There are no easy remedies, but when writers realize that in addition to unattainability, perfection also precludes spontaneity – the mistakes, missteps, and detours that have the potential to yield unexpected and worthwhile results – then the paralyzing desire to produce the sublime is often mitigated in a significant way. Furthermore, writers who understand that their initial vision of the narrative is no more than a working plan often feel freer to plunge into the work.

Building Materials: The Elements of Fiction

Early drafting of a work of fiction can be much like creating a symphony piece, wherein the composer must harmonize musical notes issued from a range of instruments, or to sustain the architectural analogy, an author, like any contractor, must use a wide variety of tools and materials throughout the building process. Of course, different writers have different methods for drafting early versions of their stories, but emerging writers, who believe they can begin by hastily sketching the bare bones of dialogue to fill in later, or that they can start out by intricately describing settings devoid of characters that they have postponed creating, usually find that the "fill-in" added to such work will appear poorly integrated into the story; the joints often show distractingly for the reader. Successful stories result when writers incorporate setting, sensory details, characterization, plot, dialogue, consistent perspective, and effective prose rhythm from the first draft, honing these throughout the long process. Just as no builder would contemplate erecting an entire house using nothing but a handsaw or just a hammer, no writer should be limited to only one or two elements of fiction. Apart from this, accessing the full toolbox of fictional elements enables the writer to immerse the self as well as the future reader convincingly in the fiction.

Setting and sensory details are absolutely essential when it comes to steeping both writer and reader in the physical world of the story. Beginning writers, though, often neglect these elements in the rush to develop plot, or else they neglect plot altogether while under the spell of their own lyrical language. Sometimes they forgo presenting too many particulars because they fear such specific references will render the work inaccessible to the general reading public. *If I set my story in Dubuque, Iowa*, these writers may reason, *how will readers in Sheridan, Wyoming or San Diego, California, or anywhere but Dubuque, be able to identify with and relate to what happens in it?* This misapprehension results in generalized and unconvincing narratives that not only do not seem to have occurred in a specific place, but often seem not to have happened at all. Skilled writers, like builders and real estate agents, know that location matters; details count.

Paradoxically, the more specifics writers provide in their narratives, the more universal the appeal of their fiction will be, provided these particulars are believably rendered and well balanced with the other elements of fiction. Experienced writers not only embrace the universal appeal of specificity, they also understand what profi-

cient liars know well: details convince. But these must be apportioned properly and perform more than one function. It is not enough to present a detail for its own sake. The details that emerge in stories should also work to serve another element of fiction such as characterization, setting, or tone. This is what makes them significant and essential to the narrative. As such, setting and details must never be inert on the page or one-dimensional as a crude backdrop to a stage. These must be dynamic. They ought to interact in interesting ways with the characters and plot. For example, a setting that works in conflict with characterization is much more engaging to the reader than one that has a neutral effect. Consider the readerly expectation met in encountering on the page a nun in church versus the interest triggered by reading about a nun in a casino. The setting and details that provide dissonance and tension have the greatest potential to sharpen and define characterization, and to fascinate the reader. In fact, setting and details that are vivid and dynamic cannot be glossed over in the way that inert passages of descriptive writing are often skimmed by impatient readers.

Evoking setting and sensory details enables readers to dwell within the fictional walls of the story from its opening pages. When a writer draws on all five senses, setting and details tend to achieve more cohesion by working in concert with one another. Inexperienced writers tend to rely primarily on visual stimuli in creating setting and imagery. While what characters see is certainly important, visual images alone are insufficient for creating a comprehensive experience. Again, skilled fiction writers appeal to all five senses, presenting sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and tactile impressions to conjure setting through imagery. Yet, involving all five senses, like deploying the many elements of fiction, is not at all like ticking off items on a grocery list. Sensory images must emanate in ways that are relevant to the story, and these should be threaded throughout the narrative instead of frontloaded in the initial pages. Additionally, sensory imagery has greater impact on the reader when presented in unexpected and original ways. For example, synesthesia, or presenting a particular sensory impression as if perceived by a different sense – such as apprehension of a sound as a sight or taste – is one useful technique for composing memorable imagery, while clichéd and overly familiar descriptors and comparatives ought to be avoided.

Pouring the Foundation: Characterization

In literary fiction, characters are often the best vehicles for conveying sensory and setting information in unique and memorable ways. If characterization is distinctive and original, the way in which fictional figures perceive the physical world should likewise be as personalized and particular as facial features or a fingerprint. Filtering imagery through well-imagined characters familiarizes readers with context clues in the same way that characters absorb empirical knowledge of the environment: through the senses. Sandra Cisneros says, "We all share one nation and that is the body." Experienced writers know they must transport readers into imaginary worlds through

the body in order to simulate an experience of fiction. While many readers may not have marched through the jungle as a soldier during the Vietnam War, most do know the experience of hefting heavily weighted burdens for some distance. This is the shared physical knowledge that Tim O'Brien relies upon in transporting readers of his short story "The Things They Carried" into the Southeast Asian countryside during that historic conflict. It matters little whether the world of the story transpires in Southeast Asia or Manchester, Maine or Minsk, on the ocean floor or on one of Saturn's rings. In order to convey readers to another place and another time, writers must forge connections through what is recognizable and familiar. That is, primarily, through the body.

Fiction, like drama, is an interactive art form. This means that readers must engage with a story by actively interpreting words on the page and relating to the fictive world in the way characters do. As such, writers are responsible for creating the experience of drama in their fiction. For this reason, many guides on narrative craft exhort writers to show and not tell when writing fiction. Showing entails creating experiences for the reader by depicting the physical world of the story and filtering this carefully through the human body, while telling – or exposition – enables the writer to disseminate information and manage the passage of time in a concise and efficient way. Both are necessary, but the relationship between showing and telling ought to be analogous to the relationship between nails and lumber. Comparatively speaking, it does not require a great volume of nails (explanation) to support a good deal of lumber (experience of the story).

Throughout the process of composing fiction, writers are beset by a series of decisions, ranging from where and when to set the story to what happens in the narrative. Arguably, the most important among these are choices concerning characterization. In the architectural analogy, characters are the tenants in the house that will be the story. They will dwell within its walls along with readers. Early on in the drafting process, writers must decide what characters will inhabit the story and anticipate how these will interact with readers. Oftentimes ideas about characters – like resonant images – will trigger a narrative, and this is a worthy, even a desirable source of inspiration, especially to writers of literary fiction who prefer to draft character-driven stories, as opposed to plot-driven narratives typical of genre fiction. In its essence, good fiction is about interesting people doing interesting things. Compelling characters enable writers to construct corresponding spirals – strands of plot and characterization that wind and twist together much like the double-helix structure of DNA. Plot emanates from character, and character, in turn, responds to plot in an interactive and dynamic process of give and take, or action and reaction. The critical interplay between character and plot shapes the core identity of story, rendering decisions about characterization crucial to fiction writing.

As such, experienced writers strive to develop characters that have sufficient definition, depth, and complexity to power what some call "the narrative engine," or to direct and lead the helical dance between characterization and plot. Writers who are deeply interested in other people, attuned to social nuance, and oriented to

process rather than outcome tend to have an advantage over more goal-directed individuals when it comes to creating effective characterization. Skilled writers know that whatever the inspiration might be – experience, memory, or imagination, characters must be fully developed and portrayed in ways that encompass and reveal the contradictory nature of human personality. Texts on craft often caution writers about "one-dimensional" or stereotypic characterization, and this is a caveat against presenting only one aspect of a character or on relying upon stock figures in story. In order to provide more dimension and depth, writers must delve deeply into the characters they create to explore a host of seemingly paradoxical traits, as well as a range of qualities and flaws, while presenting a portrayal that is consistent and believable.

First and foremost, in the manner of method actors stepping into a role, storytellers must embrace, even internalize a character's longing or motivation and swiftly establish on the page what the character wants. Presenting a character that will sustain the reader's interest means depicting a portrayal that elicits empathy and recognition, and stimulating such emotion entails developing a character the reader identifies with and cares enough about to feel invested in the outcome of the story. Emerging writers who are inclined to draw upon personal experiences tend to draft autobiographical protagonists, and such characters will often emerge as dispassionate, protected by indifference from the pain of disappointment and rejection; they are cool and distant in ways that hint at their authors' desires for such imperviousness. Or else, as people who are drawn to writing tend to be observers, student writers will mirror themselves in characters that are rather reflective and inactive. But writers who expect readers to invest in characters that they don't care about or who do not do much are placing an impossibly tall order. Such storytellers would do well to imagine the reader opening the door to a prospective roommate who transmits disaffection and passivity in every possible way. What is to keep that front door from swinging shut and the reader from moving on to interview more engaging and dynamic people?

Perhaps the most effective way to engage readers is by portraying the character's motivation, which is comprised of longing and practical desire. While longing refers to a deep chasm of yearning that can never be fully satisfied, practical desire indicates pragmatic and attainable aspiration. In Flannery O'Connor's "Revelation," Mrs Turpin, the aforementioned farmer's wife, longs for some assurance that her sense of righteousness entitles people of her social class and milieu to a glorious reception in the afterlife, while others will be dispatched below, banished from her sight. Such a paradoxical longing to have goodness recognized by the punishment of others on Judgment Day can never be fulfilled, of course, and pinpricks of humiliation that culminate in assault – when she voices her assumptions of privilege – ultimately drive Mrs Turpin to experience an epiphanic vision that dismantles her longing altogether. Clearly, motivation here is twofold, comprised of deep yearning and practical desire. On the one hand, Mrs Turpin longs for ultimate validation of her goodness, and on the other, she wants to be recognized and respected by others for her self-conceived superiority in her daily life. The longing and desire here are both unsatisfied in this story. But, practically speaking, Mrs Turpin's desire could be attained if she behaved in such a

way as to elicit recognition and respect from others, rather than merely expecting this as her birthright. This example illustrates how motivation characterizes and vitalizes Mrs Turpin in a distinctive, even unforgettable way.

Beyond shaping and defining character, longing also generates action and reaction – the inexorable chain of causality that is plot. From a character's longing and desire, the conflict of the story arises. Conflict, as defined by mediators, results from competition over resources, values, and/or attention. In complex stories, such as "Revelation," the competition, as one might expect, occurs over all three areas. But overlap often occurs even in more straightforward narratives such as fables and fairytales. In "Snow White," for example, the heroine competes with the Evil Queen for attention (as fairest of the land) and resources (command of the kingdom itself), but there is an underlying competition of values pervading the entire tale: Snow White's honest innocence is pitted against the Evil Queen's scheming cynicism. Distrust, tension, and antipathy erupt when the characters' belief systems clash, and in more sophisticated narratives, such collisions often occur between ethical positions that are equally legitimate, both morally justifiable.

In creating literary fiction, writers strive to portray conflict between well-matched opponents representing worthy positions with high stakes at risk. When reason and virtue align solely with the protagonist, and the antagonist is characterized by inexplicable and extreme malevolence, a hero-versus-villain competition emerges, and melodrama ensues. In such cases, formula trumps form, and a simplistic and predictable narrative unfolds. Creating oppositional forces that are equally righteous and well matched requires both imagination and empathic vision. In "Revelation," the oppositional forces confronting Mrs Turpin, particularly her assailant, are portrayed in such a way that they are not only knowable, but readers can easily relate to the hostility engendered in her antagonist when Mrs Turpin shares her astonishingly narrow-minded worldview. And while Mrs Turpin is bigoted and insulting to others, O'Connor nevertheless depicts her in a manner that elicits readerly compassion.

Creating complex and believable characters, like drafting a story, requires multitasking skills. Writers do well to present characters through a variety of means, including the character's words, thoughts, and actions; other characters' reactions to and interactions with the character; and physical description of the character and significant details corresponding to the character's life. Practically speaking, characterization involves descriptive writing, interiority, dialogue, and action. Again, descriptive writing means developing memorable images to appeal to the senses, to establish a physical sense of the character in a fresh and memorable way. Additionally, such description must work in more than one way, and descriptors that create tension or suggest contradiction while remaining consistent and credible to the characterization will capture the reader's attention and sustain interest.

For many writers, dialogue is an effective tool for developing characterization. When characters speak, readers experience these players in their own words, and readers have the opportunity to interpret what characters say in the way they parse and decode conversations in real life, knowing full well that people rarely mean what

they say or say what they mean. Such interpretation engages readers, enabling them to interact with the story. But writers must stimulate this interaction by generating dialogue that accomplishes a number of tasks at one time. At minimum, good dialogue must advance the narrative, characterize the speaker, and entertain the reader. Beyond this, dialogue can work symbolically when characters appear to be discussing one subject while really exchanging ideas and feelings about another matter altogether. Dialogue also establishes tone or mood by revealing the characters' attitudes toward one another and the topics under discussion. Best of all, dialogue provides the vehicle for characters to shift power dynamics among themselves in strategically compelling ways.

Framing: Perspective

Along with decisions relating to setting, imagery, characterization, and plot, writers must also choose how to tell the stories they compose. They must commit to a particular way of narrating the events that occur in fiction. Choices in narration include omniscient, objective, third person, second person, and first person perspectives. The omniscient viewpoint, associated with epics and biblical narratives, can encompass vast fictional territory, but such a perspective, as mentioned earlier, often feels out of place in contemporary English-language narratives, and apart from this, the great breadth of such narration delimits the depth and detail attainable, especially in a short story. The objective point of view allows readers to interact fully with story by forming their own judgments about characters and events, yet this form of narration restricts writers to presenting only what a detached observer would behold without access to thoughts and feelings driving the characters. Third-person limited and unlimited narration allows for presentation of interiority, but the third-person perspective can be problematic when it comes to maintaining consistency and managing narrative distance. Second-person and first-person points of view are much easier to control for consistency and they offer greater intimacy with characters, but just in the way that familiarity breeds contempt, such intimacy is not always desirable or sustainable. Many writers discover that while first- and second-person narratives can be the easiest to generate, they are often most challenging to write successfully.

Whatever decision the writer makes with regard to perspective, consistency and comprehensibility in narration will be the expectation of the reader. Emerging writers often experience significant difficulty in managing perspective. Many have trouble conceptualizing how perspective works, and because of this, they fail to notice when it becomes unmoored in their own narratives. Basically, in the first few sentences of a story, an author establishes ground rules or issues a certain pledge to the reader, in which an overall promise is made to treat the reader fairly and consistently throughout the narrative. This commitment entails informing the reader as to what kind of story will unfold and how it will be told. Just as one cannot begin narrating a story in the first person and then inexplicably shift to an omniscient or objective point of view,

one cannot begin a third-person limited narration in one character's perspective and then present a thought or feeling experienced by another character without jarring the reader. So if a story begins in the third person that is limited to a particular character, the writer commits to presenting this perspective consistently. There are times, though, when the writer may discover another viewpoint is necessary to illuminate aspects of the narrative outside the purview of the narrating character. In this case, the writer might shift the point of view in a regular way (usually signaled by a formatting change, such as a section break or italicization) that does not confuse the reader or interrupt the flow of the story. The writer must devise some means to alert the reader to perspective shifts that occur in the narrative and use such shifts in a reliable way throughout the story. If it is only necessary to provide this added perspective a few times, the writer would be well advised to reconsider shifting viewpoint and to develop another means for divulging information to which the narrating character is not privy.

Construction: The Writing Process

Once decisions regarding setting, characterization, and perspective have been made, writers often set about drafting the work. In doing so, skilled authors pay attention to the rhythm of words on the page and the level of discourse. They will often pause at the end of passages and read the work aloud, listening for the flow and authenticity of the language. At this stage, as well as during revision and editing, it is critical to be aware of phonemic relationships between words, in addition to being on the lookout for unintentional rhyming words, distracting meter, and words or phrases repeated too often or in too close proximity to one another. More importantly, writers should be ever vigilant for uneven registers of diction and pretentious language. Experienced writers recognize their "darlings" as William Faulkner would say in reference to deliberately clever wording that draws attention to itself and away from the story, and such writers will mercilessly excise such indulgences. But student writers, often fresh from high-school classes where they were lauded for including multisyllabic words in their work, tend to resist the idea that less is more when it comes to language. Even professional writers will compose early drafts that are overwritten, rife with adjectives and adverbs instead of strong and precise nouns and verbs. Reading work aloud is the best way to uncover unwieldy constructions, infelicitous phrasing, and disingenuous language. The ear detects what the eye will gloss, especially for copious readers who tend to supply missing words and correct grammatical errors automatically when absorbing a block of text.

   After a story is drafted, revised, edited, read aloud, and proofed by its author, the next phase of the process commences: yet *more* revision, *more* editing. In this phase, some writers will put the story away, removing it from sight for a few days before revisiting the work with greater detachment. Others will send the work to a few trusted readers for their responses. Student writers usually submit their drafts to a

workshop for critique by peers and feedback from an instructor. In one way or another, most authors of stories seek other opinions on their work before they are ready to submit it for publication. This process provides necessary viewpoints that are inaccessible to the author, who will likely be too close to the story and therefore myopic about the writing. What is clear in the writer's mind sometimes doesn't translate onto the page, and outside readers can pinpoint places where obscurity and confusion occur. Sandra Cisneros says that writing creatively is like cutting one's own hair. "We need someone to tell us how to make it even in the back." Peer readers perform the function of sharing critical information outside of the author's purview. But not all peer review is helpful or enlightening. Writers do well to select impartial and experienced readers, preferably writers themselves with whom they can exchange work. Astute student writers in workshops soon glean which readers best understand an author's vision for the work and provide the most valuable critique, even if it is not always what the writer wants to hear.

Revision means achieving detachment to apprehend a new vision of the work. At this stage, metaphors, symbols, even thematic undercurrents emerge, and peer readers can often point these out for the writer, who can then choose to inflect or mute these in subsequent drafting. Among other alterations at this stage, scenes can be added or deleted, characters developed or sometimes excised or even combined, pacing manipulated, and the showing-to-telling ratio adjusted. Despite the many changes a writer might make during this phase, revision is not rewriting. To extend the building metaphor, revision is likened to remodeling a kitchen or knocking out a wall to create more room space, while rewriting can be compared to razing the entire structure, say a ranch-style home, and replacing it with a Swiss chalet. Apart from the address, no one would recognize the residence. Revision preserves the integrity and essential identity of a story, fortifying an original structure that remains intact and sound. Consultation with specialists – peer readers, instructors, and mentors – enables the writer to make careful changes to improve the story.

Outside readers can also help writers with editing: nipping and tucking language, correcting continuity problems, and other minor repairs to the story. Knowledgeable fellow writers will provide practical help with punctuation and dialogue presentation, but the best instructors and workshops train writers to become topnotch editors of their own work. Self-editing entails objectivity and awareness of one's bad habits and weaknesses when it comes to language and mechanics, as well as mastering a few practices and exercises that are customized to address such shortcomings. For instance, some authors will eliminate unnecessary verbiage, perform "sponge" edits to replace modifiers with more precise nouns and verbs, or highlight all filters to determine whether or not these are necessary to the story. Alice Munro, invoked earlier, is notorious for retyping story drafts from memory with the idea of retaining only what is essential to the narrative.

Again, the idea of writing creatively suggests to many the wrongheaded notion that imaginative expression trumps all else and that following rules – even those pertaining to language and mechanics – somehow impedes such expression, shackling

the artist's creative impulses. In fact, writing creatively and composing stories means sharing a vision with the world, and in order to accomplish this, communication is essential. Stories that are hastily written, unrevised, and unedited are about as inviting to readers as ill-tended and shabbily constructed houses. Such narratives are not likely to be published by editors, who interpret flaws in the work as lack of expertise and commitment on the part of the writer. In fact, publishers are so inundated with submissions by writers that to manage their mountainous workloads they will often disqualify work that is unpolished after the first page.

Nevertheless, the temptation is strong, especially among newcomers to writing, to disregard convention and to experiment with story form, characterization, narration, and even language and mechanics. Emerging writers sometimes yearn to break all the rules and invent new ways to tell stories, and mostly to play fast and loose with perspective, possibly due to the challenges entailed in applying this consistently. Or else they may believe they can take shortcuts by drafting entire narratives in an inspired rush, and, convinced of the greatness of their work, they often refuse to revise and edit or sometimes even reread what they have produced. But yielding to such temptation before mastering story form and the elements of fiction rarely turns out well and can add significant time to what is already a long patience.

Though the elements of fiction and the stages of drafting a story are presented one after another here, these are not discrete steps to follow in a sequence. Instead most writers will find themselves continuing to go over a story, combing through it again and again to resolve concerns pertaining to setting, characterization, imagery, and plot. It's not unusual for an author to draft an entire narrative before discovering the point of view is off and that it must be shifted to another perspective or that the turning point in the plot ought to take the narrative in an entirely different direction. Over time, the ratio of time spent drafting stories in relationship to the time spent revising and editing fiction will gradually become inverted so that writers who start out expending 80 or 90 percent of their effort in composing often find themselves devoting that same percentage of work to revision and editing, allotting significantly less time to creating new narratives.

Popular culture mythologizes the inspired genius swiftly and unerringly generating sublime works of art. In the film *Amadeus*, Mozart is portrayed composing musical scores without altering a note to appeal to this romantic notion. In fact, Mozart struggled over his work, adapting and developing his music even after it had been performed. Like creating great music or erecting sound and inviting living spaces, writing fiction is comprised of much trial and error, demanding flexibility and an unflagging determination to improve. At times, storytelling can be a Sisyphean endeavor, especially for beginners undertaking their first stories. Dedicated writers, like expert builders, develop the habit of meticulousness and vigor for recursive tasks to the extent that such drive becomes similar to obsession. These tend to be people for whom the only thing more challenging than writing is not writing anything at all.

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2
Writing Creative Nonfiction

Bronwyn T. Williams

There is a short, quiet scene in the documentary *9/11* that speaks to the power of nonfiction. The documentary was a result of a project by the filmmakers Jules and Gideon Naudet to follow a rookie New York City firefighter though his first months on the job. What began as a film about a firefighter ended as a stirring documentary about the attacks on the World Trade Center towers. In the scene, eight days before September 11, it's evening and the lights have come on in the buildings of lower Manhattan. Veteran firefighter James Hanlon takes the rookie firefighter, Tony Benetatos, up on one of the ladder trucks to talk about the dangers of fighting fires on collapsing roofs. As they stand in the bucket atop the ladder, they are framed by the glittering towers of the World Trade Center, as Hanlon says:

> There's a lot of things going on at all times. Shit's hitting the fan, the roof starts to collapse, you've got to get off, you've got to really improvise, you know what I mean? Basically, you have to be on the top of your game . . . This is not a joke, this job. There's a lot of things to think about. Tunnel vision. Focus. Really. Because that's what's going to keep you alive and that's what's going to give you the opportunity to help anybody else. (Hanlon et al.)

The image of the two firefighters talking quietly about danger and duty framed by the buildings where so many of their peers will die in a few days would seem contrived and heavy-handed if included in a fictional film or a novel. As it exists in the documentary, however, it is gripping and poignant for one simple reason: It happened.

Nonfiction draws us in through the power of knowing that things actually happened. When we read the news, watch a documentary, or listen to a friend's story about an accident, we do so because we want to know what happened. We are interested in the world around us and the lives of those living in the world. When a disaster strikes, we want to know the extent of the damage; when a politician gets caught in a scandal we want to know how he or she could be so foolish; when sirens go down our street, we turn to friends and say, "I wonder where they're off to?" In all of these situations, and more, we want an accurate sense of what happened. Even as we realize that any event may be understood in many ways, we hope the teller of the news is trustworthy and that what we are being told has a direct correlation to what happened. If we ask a friend what happened at a party, we want to hear as accurate an account as possible. A thread of this even runs through readings of fiction or poetry, driving the pervasive questioning of novelists and poets to describe how much of their work is autobiographical or based on a true story.

At the same time that we want to know what is happening around us, we are also drawn to stories. Anyone reading this book doesn't have to be convinced about the power of narrative. Almost all of us would rather read or listen to a narrative rather than read a list of facts. Indeed, when given a list of facts, like unemployment figures or sports box scores, we begin to create a narrative out of the information in front of us. If humans want to know what happened, we love to know it through stories.

Creative nonfiction locates its power in our desires for knowledge and narrative. To write creative nonfiction is to bring together the relating of events, people, and places that are the province of journalists, historians, and biographers, with the narrative techniques and lyrical tools of novelists and poets. Although that seems a simple enough definition, there is one more element in most creative nonfiction that distinguishes it from just reporting or just telling a story. There is an authorial presence in creative nonfiction that reflects on and makes meaning from the events being related. While in daily journalism, for example, the goal may be to make the author as invisible as possible and allow readers to draw their own conclusions about events, in creative nonfiction there is the assumption that the author reflect on and interpret the events she is writing about. When we read the nonfiction work of Gloria Anzaldúa or Caryl Phillips or Adam Gopnik we find those writers inviting us into their thoughts and feelings; they create a sense of shared consciousness with the reader.

This combination of elements – "let me tell you the story of what I saw and what it means to me" – is at the core of creative nonfiction. This chapter will use these essential elements of creative nonfiction as a framework for discussing how to approach writing creative nonfiction. I will start by talking about some of the common genres of creative nonfiction and how they shape writing projects. Then I'll describe some specific demands in terms of invention, form, and authorial presence that creative nonfiction places on the tools of the storyteller. Finally, I will discuss the complicated business of telling the "truth," as well as the ethics of writing about others.

Genres in Creative Nonfiction

Describing the genres that fit under the umbrella of creative nonfiction can be simultaneously exhilarating and frustrating. The many variations on how to tell what happened and what it means create countless approaches available to a writer. Yet so much variety can lead to ambiguity and confusion. So many genres could be labeled creative nonfiction that it almost becomes folly to begin to categorize them. At the same time, some genre labels – such as journalism or biography – might cover works that are creative nonfiction as well as others that are not. As is often the case when discussing genre, it quickly becomes clear that genres are not stable categories and shift and overlap depending on the time, the context, and the proclivities of the writer and of the reader. Is this piece travel writing or memoir? Nature writing or personal essay?

Even so, it is worth discussing what distinguishes some of the more prominent genres of creative nonfiction. As a writer, I find it more useful not only to look at the final product when considering genre, but to begin with how the position of the writer and the material at hand shapes genre choices.

Put most simply, creative nonfiction draws its content from either introspection or observation. While almost all creative nonfiction draws from both sources, the genre in which one works is often shaped by which kind of content is the focus of the project. To put it another way: Does your lens focus in or focus out? Imagine a continuum with internal sources of information – memories, musings, ideas – at one end and external sources – reporting, researching, observing – at the other. While the writing you produce may contain elements of both ends of this continuum, the kinds of information you draw on most heavily tell you a great deal about where the genres are located on that same continuum.

Memoir

If your project involves turning primarily to your own life, your memories, experiences, and explorations of your thoughts, the genres that dominate that end of the continuum are memoir and the personal essay.

Memoir, with its focus on the memories and reflections of the author, is the most interior genre of creative nonfiction. Memoir often differs from autobiography by not trying to cover the entire story of a life. Instead, as the name implies, memoir focuses on the memories and meanings of the writer, as messy and idiosyncratic and incomplete as those may be. As Patricia Hampl says, "Memoir is the intersection of narration and reflection, of story-telling and essay-writing . . . It is a peculiarly open form, inviting broken and incomplete images, half-recollected fragments, and the mass (and mess) of detail" (266). Some memoirs focus on a small segment of life, such as Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking*, which covers one year of her life surrounding the death of her husband. Others cover a larger part of a life, but may focus on one

aspect of that life, such as a relationship with a person, one aspect of life in work or family, or a thematic set of experiences. Marjane Satrapi's graphic work *Persepolis* covers her childhood, but through the lens of her experiences in Iran during and after the revolution. What defines memoir is the way a writer works with memory to describe events, and then, crucially, to reflect on and make meaning from them.

It can be tempting with memoir to think that you need to begin with the events that people would conventionally find the most impressive or traumatic. Yet, what is most important in memoir is not the facts alone, but what you think and feel about them – then and now. So a car accident or a wedding day, while they are conventionally considered significant events, may not be the most meaningful events to write about. It may be more useful to pay attention to the memories that still dig at your mind – for good or ill. What is the indelible image, feeling, object from your past that you can't shake? You don't have to understand why as you begin, for meaning often emerges through writing and reflection. The day my father died was a dramatic day in my life, but when I think of him I don't think of that day, I think of him sitting at the kitchen table, late at night, reading the newspaper and listening to the radio. Were I writing about my father, I would start by describing those late-night moments as a way of accumulating details and exploring my thoughts and feelings about our relationship, both then and now.

Because of memoir's focus on interiors – a ready storehouse of content that requires no new information gathering – it is often an attractive genre for writers. Most of us like to have a chance to tell our stories, about our experiences. What's more, memoir is often perceived as an easy genre, as we all have easy access to our memories. Yet the very abundance and proximity of memories can create unexpected difficulties. Deciding what memories, what details, to pull from the teeming sea of thoughts sloshing about in our heads is a daunting challenge. Too much daily detail can be tedious, yet too little can be baffling if we forget that what is clear in the mind and felt in the bones cannot be understood by readers until it is on the page. Sifting through the tangle of memories and emotions to create coherent and meaningful reflections is also a painstaking and sometimes arduous task. Still, a successful memoir is engrossing, whether the events in it seem familiar or exotic, because it simultaneously brings us into the life and mind of another person and offers us a guide to how we might make sense of our own memories and experiences.

The personal essay

The personal essay also grows from an internal exploration of the mind of the writer, but differs from memoir by focusing not solely on memories and the past. Rather the essay invites the reader along on the writer's journey to ponder, ruminate, criticize, and otherwise follow an idea where it may go. The term "personal essay" strikes me as redundant, but has unfortunately become necessary to distinguish it from dull and formulaic expository school assignments. The essay extends back to Michel de

Montaigne, who labeled his subjective, idiosyncratic, literary explorations *Essais*, or "Attempts." Montaigne's attempts are to take an idea, problem, or concept, turn it over in his mind, drawing on memories, observations, other books, whatever is at hand, and ponder it, and its implications, more fully. He does not aim to persuade the reader of a specific position, but instead invites the reader into his mind as he wrestles with the thoughts and issues which intrigue and trouble him. The titles of Montaigne's essays – "Of Sleep," "Of Fear," "Of the Uncertainty of Our Judgment" – may tell us where his journeys begin, but don't prepare us for every turn, insight, or digression on the trip.

For contemporary essayists, the allure – and challenge – of the genre is the same. The attempt, the exploration, begins with the idea or problem or insight that nags at the mind and pulls the writer toward it. Through writing we explore our thoughts and emotions on the subject, to discover what we know and think about the subject and follow the thoughts where they may lead. The writing can be digressive, the end of the essay perhaps inconclusive. Yet, when done well, the successful essay, like travels in a new land, often depends less on the destination than the quality of journey itself. Phillip Lopate notes: "The essayist attempts to surround something – a subject, a mood, a problematic irritation – by coming at it from all angles, wheeling and diving like a hawk, each seemingly digresssive spiral actually taking us closer to the heart of the matter" ("Introduction," xxxviii). If the essay is an exploration of the writer's consciousness, then the material for the exploration must come from the interior, from memories, reflections, musings, critical insights. Unlike memoir, however, the essay leads the writer to other books and stories, to philosophy, to research, to observation, as long as they are in the service of exploring the contours and nuances of the idea. Lopate in *Portrait of My Body* uses an examination of his body to muse on aging and identity and create an intimate, internal essay. But David Foster Wallace's "Consider the Lobster," finds the details of a trip to the Maine Lobster Festiveal a springboard to an exploration of questions about food and animal welfare.

Some critics regard the essay as an exercise in self-indulgence. They argue that some writers take Montaigne's statement "I am myself the matter of my book" as license for unreflective navel-gazing. Certainly there is a danger for writers who forget that they have the company of the reader on their journey. On the other hand, the well-crafted essay is a joy in which the reader both discovers new lands of information and insight, as well as the opportunity to travel inside an inquisitive and open mind.

Observations of travel, nature, and culture

If memoir and the essay offer writers genres through which to explore the interiors of their minds, creative nonfiction also provides opportunities for those who find their interests in the world they encounter. These writers find their motivation in what they can observe, and what sense they make of those observations as they bring them into their minds. Like the sciences or social sciences, observations undertaken by crea-

tive nonfiction writers are often detailed and meticulous. Unlike conventional research-ers, however, the observations may be intimate and idiosyncratic, and the reflection and analysis deeply personal and filtered through emotion and experience. As Scott Sanders notes about his piece "Cloud Crossing," about climbing a mountain with his infant son, the importance of the writing is not only in the description, but in the reflection that connects his life with others. "To make that climb up the mountain vividly present for readers is harder work than the climb itself. I choose to write about my experience not because it is mine, but because it seems to me a door through which others might pass" (*Secrets of the Universe*, 202).

Nature writing, travel writing, and writing about culture are three examples of genres that begin in observation. For writers such as Gretel Ehrlich or Barry Lopez, for example, their work begins in their observations of the natural world. It is through what they see – and no doubt through the notes they make – that they find their subjects. In the same way, writers such as Jan Morris or Pico Iyer often begin their work with what they see in the places to which they travel. When Morris writes about Istanbul or South Africa or Iyer about Japan or Toronto, we can see those places through their eyes and realize the care they take in their observations. What makes the work of writers such as these different than traditional researchers, however, is the openly personal element to their work. They make sure we realize that when we see through their eyes, on the tundra or in the city, we are allowed their personal and idiosyncratic vision. Creative nonfiction writers who work through observation make no pretense of comprehensiveness or objectivity. Instead it is the authorial presence, the individual perspective, that is valuable in these observations.

What draws readers to observation-based creative nonfiction is the surprise and insight that comes from the unexpected details the writers reveal, such as what Kath-leen Norris finds in the winter fields around her home in the Dakotas, or Scott Russell Sanders in the grubs in his backyard. Creative nonfiction that works from observation combines an attention to telling details with the individual reflection and meaning making that is common to the essayist or memoirist. Writing more observational creative nonfiction appeals to writers for whom the connections to the social world and to the world outside are particularly strong. It can be tempting to think that such projects require travel to exotic or unusual places, and certainly one pleasure in reading such work is to be transported to new and very different locations. On the other hand, writers such as Norris and Sanders have shown time and again how obser-vation and attention to the detail of the places and people in their neighborhoods, or even their backyards, open up new worlds to wonder about.

Journalistic creative nonfiction

At the far end of our imaginary continuum is writing that focuses most heavily on gathering information through the kinds of interviews and reporting usually associ-ated with journalism. In fact, the activities of these writers – such as conducting

interviews, observing events, going through public records - would often be indistinguishable from those of daily journalists. The distinction comes in the strategies of storytelling and reflection that come into play when the writers turn their reporting into prose. When writers engage in these genres of writing, they turn their lenses out from themselves to gather the content for their work, only later to step back and reflect on and interpret what they have gathered. At times these approaches have been called "literary journalism" or "new journalism." Certainly the reporting is a central part of this kind of writing project and any writer wanting to follow this road would be advised to hone the skills of interviewing, careful observation, and so on. Unlike daily journalism, this form of reporting is usually not as limited by deadline pressure and allows for a more deliberate and less hurried form of reporting.

While traditional journalists try their best to be the eyes of a reader, but focus on reporting without embellishment, the creative nonfiction writer turns at some point to interpretation and reflection. Some writers, such as Susan Orlean and Jennifer Kahn, are explicitly present in their personal responses and reflections on their reporting. Other writers, such as Tara Bahrampour, Luis Alberto Urrea, or Tracy Kidder, without necessarily using "I" in their writing, still bring their insights, their interpretations to their writing in ways that make their authorial presence clear. Journalistic creative nonfiction also requires a willingness to turn center stage over to other people and their ideas and concerns for much of the writing. The writer who takes on such a project needs to revel in the stories of others and in being the person to relate those stories.

A related genre to journalistic creative nonfiction is work brings together scholarship and narrative. Writers who bring their research together with narrative and reflection redefine how scholarly writing is constructed and perceived. Rather than hiding behind a facade of detached, objective researcher, these scholar/writers connect their research with their experiences and perceptions in ways that illustrate how one shapes the other. Mike Rose in *Lives on the Boundary* and Victor Villaneuva in *Bootstraps* bring memoir together with literacy education research, for example. Other scholar/writers, such as Ruth Behar in *The Vulnerable Observer*, use creative nonfiction to show how the tradition of the faceless scholar also can erase other identities from the page. Still others use the approach of the essayist to explore how certain ideas might be connected in unexpected and enlightening ways.

My attempt to define how different approaches to creative nonfiction inform certain genre choices already has me questioning my descriptions. Overlapping genres, differences in perceptions, evolving ideas about writers and audience, all complicate any discussion of genre as soon as it begins. Where, for example, do I locate Annie Dillard's "Total Eclipse" (in *Teaching a Stone to Talk*), which seems to contain within it memoir, nature writing, and the essay? And what do I call Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*, which moves from history to biography to journalism to travel writing to memoir, and more, from one chapter to the next? Still, there are advantages, if you know what you want to write about, in having a sense of the genres you'll be working in and what some of the possibilities and constraints might be. Also genre considera-

tions can certainly help when identifying and describing your project to editors and publishers. But be aware that getting too wrapped up in genre definitions can limit your options as a writer.

Writing Approaches

When it comes to writing creative nonfiction, there is lots of advice and many different approaches. There are many books and articles, a number of which I've included at the end, that offer specific exercises and strategies to get you started on and help you develop a creative nonfiction project. It is also the case that the tools available to the novelist are equally available to the creative nonfiction writer. The strategies and advice about form, details, voice, scenes, narrative, revision, editing, and other approaches to writing fiction and poetry that are contained in other chapters of this book, as well as other books, also benefit the writer of creative nonfiction. As a writer and a teacher, I have my favorite exercises and approaches, but not room to cover them all here. So I would urge writers to explore these resources and try different ideas until they find ones that work for them.

There are, however, three areas of writing that sometimes differ in emphasis from writing fiction or poetry, and yet are particularly crucial for the creative nonfiction writer to attend to and master. I do, then, want to spend a moment on some thoughts on invention, form, and the position of the writer.

Invention

Once you've determined in a broad sense where your writing will focus, whether on interior memories, external observations, or some combination, you are faced with a task that makes the creative nonfiction writer distinct from novelists and poets: you must gather information. Although writers working in other traditions may sometimes do research, it is not required to be able to write a successful work of fiction or poetry. The creative nonfiction writer, on the other hand, has to compile the material of what happened. There is no making up the events, places, or people. The necessity of gathering facts, observations, research, or memories may at times feel arduous or burdensome, but it is at the core of why people read nonfiction. When you take the time to compile the information you need, however, you also find the rewards of surprise and the insights that emerge from the process.

It's important to gather a lot of material before you can decide what is important and compelling to you, and what will be compelling to your readers. The more you gather, the more you can select, can winnow, and can be surprised. There is an apocryphal story about Michelangelo and his sculpture of David, in which an admirer asked the artist how he carved such an exquisite masterpiece, and Michelangelo is supposed to have replied that he simply "carved away all that wasn't David." From a

writer's perspective, the relevant metaphor here is that we have to carve away at the material we have to find the most compelling and meaningful parts to relate to our readers. Unlike the sculptor, however, we are not presented with a piece of marble. Instead we must accumulate our material on the page before we can have anything to shape into a finished work. It is only when we have gathered enough material that we can stand back from it, ponder it, and get a sense of the possibilities and directions of what we write. As Don Murray says, "The writer sits down intending to say one thing and hears the writing saying something more, or less, or completely different. The writing surprises, instructs, receives, questions, tells its own story, and the writer becomes the reader wondering what will happen next" (7). It is only when we gather more material than we might at first think we need that we discover the importance of serendipitous connections.

I like to borrow the term "invention" from classical rhetoric for this stage in the process. Like the inventor, you're not starting from scratch. You have materials, you have what previous inventors have achieved as inspiration and guidance, yet it is up to you to discover how to put these materials together in new ways that express your ideas. After all, the more complete story of Michelangelo and his sculpture is that, before he put chisel to stone, he studied the marble, made preliminary sketches and even a small model. I've never met a writer who doesn't engage in some kind of invention practices, whether it is note-taking, journaling, freewriting, or some other approach. Starting with writing that is low stakes and informal allows you to explore possibilities, be surprised, and even take wrong turns now and then, all of which are necessary to writing well. Wrong turns can be useful too. This is exploration, not using a GPS system.

Although there are many approaches to invention, a common thread to many of the suggestions is to engage in some kind of generative, informal writing where you resist the urge to edit – or censor – yourself and instead just get words on a page. Whether it is keeping a journal or taking notes or freewriting from a key word or emotion, it is essential to keep writing. Don't worry about digressions, and if you get stuck, turn to another topic, lower your standards, and write some more. It may help to begin with the particular idea or image and use that as a springboard to more exploratory writing. For example, you can write everything you know about a person, or list all you can remember in an important room, and all events and details associated with those people or places. Or you can work thematically, from a list of childhood heroes, or favorite summer smells and sounds. Invention writing helps with discovery and focus as well as amassing the details you'll eventually need to write compelling descriptions. No one can keep all the details and insights needed for a memoir or an essay organized only in the mind. Memory is cluttered and capricious; by getting thoughts and memories and emotions on the page you write toward knowledge, toward surpise and insight. As the oft-quote notion from E.M. Forster puts it, "How can I know what I think until I see what I say?" What will result from this informal writing is some material that you like, some you will want to carve away, and some that will lead you in new and exciting directions.

Working toward an essay or writing more externally focused creative nonfiction also benefits from invention writing. Though you still must accumulate information and write informally to explore ideas and emotions, the strategies you use for those other projects may be different. For example, the essay writer may, like Montaigne, begin with a concept, such as anger, or housework, or an object such as a favorite coffee cup or hated wedding gift, or the daily things that are puzzling, annoying, or worrying, such as the person making business cellphone calls in the local coffee shop. For observational or journalistic writing, even after taking notes – or in the process of interviews or observations – engaging in invention writing helps define and discover the focus of the project.

Form

The approaches to form that are available to the novelist are available to the creative nonfiction writer. This is important to remember because the first inclination for many writers when working with creative nonfiction is to construct a straightfoward, chronological narrative. Because we experience life in chronological order, some writers initally assume that fidelity to the truth and the necessity of logical organization require writing that reflects those experiences. Straightforward narratives also mimic how we usually tell stories or remember what has happened to us. Certainly there is nothing wrong with a chronological structure and it may be the best approach for a piece of writing, but it is important to realize that it is not the only approach. One great gift of writing is that it offers us the opportunity to manipulate time and space. Just as with the novelist, the creative nonfiction writer can condense, expand, fold back, reorder, and otherwise play with space and time. Flashbacks, foreshadowing, changing perspectives, changing the order in which events are told, are all fair game and may be effective dramatically and stylistically. In a piece of writing it may make sense to cover years in one sentence, or take pages to describe the detail of one crucial minute.

Toward the same end, many writers of creative nonfiction find it effective to disrupt the linear structure prose. From memoir to reporting, writers use approaches such as collage, or fragments, or chapters in their approaches to form. Fragmented forms, as they do in fiction, can help the writer shape dramatic tension that highlights particular events or ideas. Nonlinear forms also allow writers to work thematically, which for creative nonfiction writers can help develop insights that are valuable precisely because they challenge the reader to move away from the chonological experiences of daily life. Yet such approaches are not random. Robert Root, for example, in writing about the uses of segmented essays that build meaning like a collage or series of small chapters, points out: "Segmented essays don't abandon structure – rather such essays are designed in ways that may be organic with the subject, ways the incrementally explain themselves as the reader progresses through the essay" (324). For one piece I wrote, for example, I divided my experiences into three "voices" that all began from

the same statement — "My father always said, 'Never let the truth get in the way of a good story.'" — but then showed how my different personas led to different ways I had responded to those words. Attempting to cover the same material chronologically would have missed the idea that I often shifted among these identities at the same time. Fragmented forms also sometimes provide a structure for the reflection necessary for creative nonfiction.

Experimentation is the key to finding the best form for a piece of writing. Every writer I know has written pieces that went through a number of different approaches to form before finding the one that worked best. Read a variety of examples, such as Dave Eggers' *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* or Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* or Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, and try your own. Draw from metaphors in other media, such as visual arts or film or music, to create forms such as the collage or the sonata or the suspense film into which you adapt your writing. It can be useful to begin with writing descriptions that are detailed and chronological, whether from memory or observation. Once those scenes are on the page it can be easier to take a step back and begin to play with the pieces.

Authorial position

It's worth repeating that, regardless of the genre, the question of meaning, of significance, is central to creative nonfiction. Where other forms of nonfiction – from instruction manuals to daily journalism – may focus on relating facts, creative nonfiction is set apart not only by the use of narrative, but by the authorial presence. It is not enough only to relate details and description, not enough simply to say, "these are my memories, this is what I saw, now the reader can figure out the importance of it all." For one thing, rest assured that readers will do their own interpreting of any work. But, more to the point, without a sense of authorial presence and interpretation, creative nonfiction becomes narrative without a point. Imagine a story your friend tells you with only facts and no sense of why you are being told the story. Is it supposed to be funny? Tragic? Terrifying? Sad? How do we know? It is the author stepping back to reflect, to explain, to expand on her interpretation of the events, the people, the ideas, that sets creative nonfiction apart. When we know why the narrative matters to the author, then we can know why it matters to us. Fiction or poetry does not always contain the same detached, reflective moment or moments. Sometimes characters or personas in fiction or poetry are not aware of insights the author provides. But, in creative nonfiction, the authorial presence that guides the reader is an important element and allure of the form.

The necessity of reflection is not a call for a canned moral appended to the end, along the lines of "Thus I learned the importance of friendship." Nor does it always mean having to write in the first person. The best reflection is usually as complex and nuanced as the thoughts careening about our heads. Readers appreciate writers who try to reflect that complexity, even as they understand it may ultimately be incom-

plete. In the same way, it's not advisable to seek a single approach to incorporating reflection. As with questions of form, the tools available to the novelist are available to the creative nonfiction writer. Reflection may be incorporated throughout a piece of writing, or only occur at the end. It may be set off in its own fragments, or seamlessly entwined with events. Experimentation and finding models to read are the best guides and, as with form, accumulating material through invention practices offers a chance to step back from the events and emotions and then write more about how they are perceived now.

Creative nonfiction often contains interior thoughts of two kinds – the reaction to events at the time they happened and the reflection on them now. Memoir, in particular, relies on these different kinds of interior material, often highlighting the changes or tensions that emerge between how we thought about events as they unfolded and what we understand about them as we look back with the aid of experience and, sometimes, wisdom. While essential in memoir, the dual nature of interiors is often also found in other genres because there is almost always the gap between the time when we gather material, whether in experiences or observation, and when we write about that material. Just as important is that the very act of writing, of organizing our ideas and experiences into prose, changes how we understand what has happened and leads us to new ways of thinking about events, people, emotions, and ideas.

A final common question about authorial presence in creative nonfiction concerns how explicit and personal that presence must be. How intimate must the writer be with the reader? What is the best way to reveal the author's presence and thoughts? Again, there is as much variation in the answers to these questions as there are writers with varying projects and goals. For some writers, particularly memoirists, the presence is explicit and intimate, with a great reliance on the first-person, such as Mary Karr's approach in her memoir *The Liars' Club*. Other writers with other projects, such as John McPhee's more journalistic *The Control of Nature*, have an authorial presence that is more subtle and more detached, often with the word "I" rarely appearing in an essay – though there is no disputing the clear and thoughtful presence of the writer in McPhee's work. Other writers move in and out of more intimate and explicitly personal passages, or find using another point of view to be effective. In "What's Inside You, Brother?" Touré writes about his experiences with boxing and identity in the second-person, and the effect is to help us see how he has develped another persona with which he confronts the world. Touré's approach reminds us that while the authorial presence in a piece of writing undoubtedly belongs to the author, it is also a performance crafted to present a particular persona of the author to the reader. I may be the same person when I look in the mirror in the morning, but my performance of identity – writer? husband? teacher? father? – changes throughout the day depending on the context and the audience. Reading the different versions of Montaigne's work, an author who appears intent on letting the reader fully into his mind, shows that he carefully crafted and revised his presentation of self. In the same way, the identity I perform in my creative nonfiction, while still me, may change in terms of the distance, the revelation, the explicitness with which I reveal my presence.

Truth, Ethics, and Representation

We come, at the end, to the knotty question of truth in creative nonfiction. Every time I teach a class, offer a workshop, or give a reading, the questions I get most frequently have to do with the relationship of creative nonfiction to the truth. How do I create dialogue in memoir 20 years after the events, when I didn't have a tape recorder running at the time? Do I believe in bending events to create a more compelling narrative? Isn't memory notoriously faulty? Can I combine people into one character? What if I want to write about people I know and say things they won't like? If the power of creative nonfiction is the telling of what happened, isn't that undermined by the choices we make in telling stories?

Obviously, any time the question of "truth" comes up in a conversation, there is no easy answer. If you ask ten writers of creative nonfiction how to answer the questions above you might very well get ten different answers. People have written countless pages on the subject and, rather than pretend that I can synthesize or summarize all of these points of view, I can, in the best creative nonfiction tradition, tell you what I think.

Any time we tell a story, we craft that story so that we include some details and leave out others. When I craft the identity I choose to display in my writing, I must make choices about what to reveal and what to keep hidden. The moment any story is told, truth, as an unbiased, objective quality, disappears. Memory is capricious, observation always subjective, and events always open to interpretation. At the same time, I believe that when you write creative nonfiction you have a responsbility to be as accurate as possible in what you relate to others. You have to maintain a fidelity to telling about things as clearly and truthfully as you can. You have to be honest with yourself. As Groucho Marx put it,

> The trouble with writing a book about yourself is that you can't fool around. If you write about someone else, you can stretch the truth from here to Finland. If you write about yourself the slightest deviation makes you realize instantly that there may be honor among thieves, but you are just a dirty liar. (Marx 3)

So, while writing about what you have lived through and observed may not produce objective truth, you also have an obligation to the reader to be honest. If the power of creative nonfiction is that these things happened, you can't play with events or combine people just so it makes the narrative easier to write. The publicity that occurs when a writer such as James Frey is found to have fabricated a memoir is linked to the betrayal readers feel when their trust in the writer to be honest has been betrayed. Part of the challenge and the reward of creative nonfiction is crafting the materials at hand into an engaging and creative work. Michelangelo couldn't add marble to his sculpture of David, and you have to live up to your deal with the reader to work with what you have. If I can't remember precise quotations from a conversation that took place years ago, I not only try to be as accurate as I can, I also try to remember how

that person spoke, their speech patterns and turns of phrase, and recreate dialogue that is as accurate in my mind as I can make it. My perspective on the events and observations I have encountered is my own, but I will promise you, as a reader, that I am being as honest with myself, and with you, about what happened, what I felt, and what I think about it now. Others will no doubt have different perspectives and, if they write about them, then the multiple perspectives may not result in truth, but perhaps greater understanding.

   The question of representing others also presents no simple answers. Writers of creative nonfiction have to remember that they are writing about real people, not fictional characters. Some writers, such as Lynn Bloom, argue that their observations and their experiences are their own and they can write what they wish, leaving others to tell their own stories if they like. "No matter what their subjects think, creative nonfiction writers defending the intergrity of their work should not, I contend, expose their material either to censorship or consensus" (Bloom 279). My feeling, as I have written about before, is that the power to write well, and to publish, is a power not always available to others and comes with some ethical responsibilities. I know, for example, that my mother is not going write a memoir, so that when I write about her it is only my story that is going to be read. Even if she were a writer, I believe that when we write about others we should be honest with them about the work we are producing. Though there are occasionally reasons that make it impossible, my philosophy is to show my drafts to those about whom I am writing. I do not necessarily promise that I will change what I have written according to their responses. At the same time, on the rare occasions when someone says publishing a piece would be painful for them, I have chosen not to publish it. I am not so vain as to see my writing as worth causing pain to people. But that's just me.

Whether it is through a piece of travel writing that takes us around the world, or a memoir that echoes our experiences, creative nonfiction has the capacity to engage us in making sense of the world we all share. By writing well, by making meaning of the events that have happened, we all learn more about our world and the people with whom we share it. One of the great strengths of the printed word is its ability to convey interior thoughts and emotions. Creative nonfiction allows us into the minds and hearts of others, to gain a richer understanding of the human condition.

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3
Writing Poetry

Nigel McLoughlin

What follows will explore and analyze the types of knowledge inherent in and gener-
ated through the writing process as it applies to poetry. I will attempt to elucidate
how the process of making poetry may be seen as a research methodology and will
map the process onto a familiar research paradigm for comparison. The aim is to
demonstrate that poetry and by extension other experimental artistic practices may
usefully be seen as methodologies for research which generate new knowledges within
their domains. Others will take various different views on what aspects of writing to
privilege and my approach is not intended to denigrate artistic practice, but in an era
where much practice in the art takes place in the academy, and where the practice
and production of poetry is an integral part of academic programs in creative writing,
there is an imperative to articulate the research process in verbal arts and make explicit
the artistic and reflective processes within them in terms that the rest of the academic
community may recognize.

Definitions

It is difficult to start a chapter called writing poetry without first defining what those
terms actually mean. Here one would normally expect a working definition of poetry
but poetry is a particularly slippery beast to define. My particular favorite definition
is that of Housman: "I received from America a request that I would define poetry. I
replied that I could no more define poetry than a terrier can define a rat, but that

I thought we both recognized the object by the symptoms which it provokes in us" (in Barron et al. 50). He goes on to say that "the seat of this sensation is the pit of the stomach" (51). The impossibility of defining poetry stems from the fact that it means so many different things to many different people. To some, it must have rhythmic beat; to others it must have musicality; some would argue for both; and others for none.

What I like about the Housman quote is its visceral nature. Recognition depends not on linguistic criteria or on conscious thought, but on what is physically felt. It does not demand structure or form. It is beyond that. I would argue that the closing passage of "The Dead" (Joyce, *Dubliners*) and large chunks of the central part of *To the Lighthouse* (Woolf) are poetry too. Poetry doesn't exist in its shape or the line length, but in what it does with language, and what it makes you feel when you hear and read it. Since no matter what definition one settles on, there will be at least one poet somewhere who will object, rightly, that the definition does not apply to what they do, I'll settle on something as broad and inclusive as I can make it: Poetry is experiments in language using all of the features of language, that produces responses in the reader that are not confined to language or conscious cognition. In many respects, that poets argue with definitions of poetry is to be expected and to be welcomed. The definition of poetry mutates every time someone does something new, and as long as poets keep doing something new, there will always be poetry.

So what do we mean by writing? In many textbooks a chapter with this title would offer tips for getting poetry written, in others it might put across the author's view of what *real* poetry might be. In still other books the author would draw on examples of really good poems and explicate for the reader why these are particularly good examples of poetry, or speculate as to the influences and confluences, both autobiographical and cultural, which led to the production of the piece. I will do none of those things. I will instead assume that those who will read this chapter will neither need nor want my hints or tips on how to write poems, nor would many of them agree with any argument I might make for what poetry should be. This does not mean that a reader who approaches this chapter primarily seeking such insights will gain nothing from the argument, but rather I hope will come away with a new way of seeing what poetry can do. I will assume that the reader is capable of analyzing poems and is knowledgeable enough to research their influences for themselves. Rather, I will problematize and investigate the process of how poems are made. I will look at the process in a way that I hope will spark debate about the process and about what writing means, so as a working definition of writing I will offer: the process of getting poems made.

This chapter will address the process of making experiments *in* language *with* language that produce responses in readers that are not confined to the linguistic or consciously cognitive. I hope that in choosing such a broad definition, the investigation of the process will be generalizable to the making of all verbal art, and perhaps all art, simply because so many of the strategies are identical, though the end product may be classified by the maker or the consumer under a different heading than poetry.

Poetry as Knowledge

There are three main elements that enable the generation of new knowledge in poetry. Amabile describes these as domain-relevant skills, creativity-relevant skills, and motivational factors. Motivational factors include knowledge related to the nature of creative motivation and self-motivational skills. Domain-relevant skills may be further subdivided into practical and theoretical domain-specific knowledge and domain habitus (Bourdieu). I will deal with each of these in turn before moving on to creativity-relevant skills and motivational factors. Domain-specific knowledge with regard to poetry applies to the skills and knowledge that the poet needs in order to structure a poem. The poet needs to know about various varieties of rhyme, various metrics, tropes such as metaphor and irony, a wide variety of formal structures and various theories of poetics such as imagism and projective verse. These are all base elements from which the poet may build a poem and the knowledge relates not just to their identification, but also to their adept usage. This knowledge takes time to acquire, and Kramp and Ericsson have shown that in order to gain expertise in music 10,000 hours of solitary practice is required. This has been shown to extend to many other domains within the arts and sciences and is often described as the ten-year rule (Ericsson et al.). It is as true of poetry as it is of any other discipline (Hayes).

In order for the poet to come to an intimate relationship with the knowledge of their craft, significant time must be spent reading and reflecting on other poets and practicing with the tropes and forms of poetry so that the poet can understand the subtleties and nuances of which poetry is capable, and become adept at combining all of the various aspects of the poem into a coherent and original whole. Reading other poets is a significant part of this process; it is difficult to be original when one does not know what has been done, and what is currently being done. These types of knowledge may be further adapted and reacted to by the new poet, for whom they form part of the prevailing habitus of the domain. To expand on our two exemplar theories from earlier, those two theories are based on the privileging of different aspects of the poem: Projective verse privileges breath and its use as a rhythmic measure: "verse will only do in which a poet manages to register the acquisitions of his ear *and* the pressure of his breath" (Olsen 273, emphasis in the original). Imagism, on the other hand, privileges the image as the building block of poetic expression:

> An "Image" is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time . . . It is the presentation of such a "complex" instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art. (Pound)

These two theoretical perspectives could be combined to create a poetry that is rich in both and deals in an original manner with structure. Such combinations of ideas

resonate with Koestler's theory of bisociation of two matrices of thought as a fertile creative strategy.

Poets can use many strategies with regard to existing poetic theories in order to generate original work. This may involve deviation from the theory, reaction against the theory, completion of the theory where it is viewed to be deficient, reinterpretation of the theory as it stands; or as in our example above, through recombination with other theories. Bloom deals with many of these strategies in detail in *The Anxiety of Influence* so I won't belabor them here. However, it is important to note that these are creative strategies for engaging and developing poetics and craft as the poet encounters and reevaluates them. They can often result in changes in the body of craft knowledge through the addition of new theories of poetics and the addition of new ways of using trope or image for example, which change the prevailing habitus for the next generation of poets.

Bourdieu defined habitus as "a product of history" which "produces individual and collective practices" and "schemes of perspective, thought and action which tend to generate the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms" (54). Contemporary poetry is one such set of practices and perspectives. The new poet must be socialized into the preexisting habitus by learning the doxa that relate the habitus to the field. Doxa is defined as "the relationship of immediate adherence that is established in practice between the habitus and the field to which it is attuned" (68) and the term relates to the "commitment to the presuppositions . . . of the game" (66). Poets must learn these presuppositions and practices before they can attempt to change them. This socialization process takes time and creates two opposing forces within the poet, a knowledge of the current habitus, a knowledge of what the field (in Csikszentmihalyi's terms) will accept. This often tends to conservatism. The poet will also endeavor to move the art forward and therefore change the habitus of the domain (either greatly or slightly).

This motivation may be related to Sternberg et al.'s classification of creative propulsions within a conceptual space. They argue that creativity can tend toward replication, redefinition, forward incrementation, advance forward incrementation, redirection, reconstruction, reinitiation, and synthesis. All except the first of these require some change in the habitus of the domain. Forward incrementation is the most common strategy. The poet views the domain as moving in the right direction and attempts to add to that direction without moving too far outside expected norms. Advance forward incrementation attempts to challenge the norms, while still keeping the overall direction. Many of the others require large changes to the habitus (such as redirection, reconstruction, and reinitiation) and these may well be resisted by the field (who are gatekeepers of the domain) because they threaten the current power relation within the domain and the privileged position of the gatekeepers.

Acts of imagination draw together authorial intention; learned and innate strategies which enhance or enable the creative process; and theories and knowledge related to craft and poetics that may influence how the author might imagine the poem. Creativity-relevant skills are those skills the individual either possesses innately or has

come to learn through the practice of creativity. Most common among these creativity-relevant skills are divergent thinking, the ability to fluently produce a variety of original different ideas; tolerance of ambiguity, the ability to hold in mind several conflicting possibilities; remote association, the ability to link two or more disparate ideas by seeing the connection between them; and the ability to reconceptualize a problem in other terms (Guildford). Several creativity tests are designed to test these faculties, for example the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (Torrance) and the Remote Associates Test (Mednick).

Artistic and poetic problems are usually ill-defined. A significant part of the creative skill of the poet consists of conceptualizing the problem in a form in which it may be expressed and addressed. Remote association can be linked to poetry through metaphor and simile, which are basically ways of seeing anew and making connections between disparate things in order to better understand an experience and its relationship with the world, and communicate that understanding so that others may see the experience anew too. Strategies have emerged to help promote remote association. It is thought that states of defocused attention promote remote association through allowing the brain to idle and make associations that would normally be filtered out by the brain's supervisory attentional systems. Evidence for this type of creative strategy has recently been provided by neuropsychological studies (Martindale), but creative individuals have been advocating similar approaches throughout history (Coleridge, Yeats, Poincaré).

These strategies tend to promote favorable conditions to allow insight to emerge from intuition. Policastro distinguished the two as follows: "intuition entails vague and tacit knowledge whereas insight involves sudden and usually clear awareness" (90). Learned skills may consist of much more algorithmic and analytic strategies for thinking through problems (Weisberg; Finke et al.) that have been found to work in the past while working on similar poems. New algorithms may emerge from new combinations of existing algorithms found in the work of other poets that provided those poets with structure and ways to conceptualize the artistic problem. An example might be the evolution of one form into another, where the preexisting formal constraint is "hurt" or modified in an interesting way to accommodate the new poem. In this way forms and tropes can be reenvisioned and evolved and new knowledge regarding these can be discovered, thereby increasing the available store of creativity-relevant skills available both to the poet in their future practice and other poets who may read the work and recognize the development. These algorithms often involve much more convergent and logical thinking approaches to elaborating and developing the ideas generated through more divergent processes. These processes also tend to be more goal-directed or split the problem up into manageable stages. Such strategies will be more prevalent in the later more analytic stages of the creative process.

For instance, according to the Geneplore model (Finke et al.), greater creativity tends to be achieved through generating an initial base structure that can then be explored and modified for utility afterwards. The poetic equivalent may be thought of in terms of generating interesting images and then trying to find metaphoric uses

for them. This means starting with the vehicle of the metaphor and attempting to find a tenor and ground. Many poets will keep interesting images in notebooks, which may eventually find their way into poems as metaphors. Conversely, one may start with the tenor of the metaphor and try to find an appropriate vehicle and ground to make the reader see it anew. This may require strategies that involve remote association and divergent thinking. The practice of these strategies generates variations that lead to new knowledge within the creativity-relevant skills possessed by the poet and these may be disseminated through teaching. These new strategies become part of the knowledge within the domain if they prove widely successful or adaptable for others. For examples of this type of knowledge see the plethora of "how to" manuals that exist offering creative exercises which have worked for others in the past in the generation and structuring of new work.

Writing practices that generate absorption in the task help the creative process. Csikszentmihalyi describes flow as a merging of action and awareness, a distorted sense of time, a lack of self-consciousness, total absorption in a task that is balanced for ability and challenge, and enjoyment of the task for the task's sake. This state is not passive, but an active striving where a problem requires total focus and application and integration of domain-relevant skills with creativity-relevant skills by a highly motivated individual. It manifests the fact that intrinsic concerns have replaced extrinsic concerns to the extent that they are blocked from attentional focus. Some, like Yeats, seem to go into a trance-like state: "Had my pen not fallen on the ground and made me turn from the images that I was weaving into verse, I would never have known that meditation had become a trance" (Yeats 157).

Amabile suggests that intrinsic motivation may be the most important enabling factor in generating creative output. This relates to the internal satisfaction gained through the performance of the task and is not related to external pressure or reward. She has shown that anticipation of reward, deadlines, as well as anticipation of assessment are often demotivating factors which lead to less creative outputs because of the tendency toward satisficing, that is, producing an acceptable output quickly rather than a truly creative one. Understanding how motivation is affected by these factors allows the poet to increase their self-motivational skills by concentrating on the pure enjoyment of the task and minimizing the drive toward satisficing when faced with deadlines and the thought of critical appraisal.

Poetry and the Generation of Knowledge

Figure 3.1 represents the basic stages involved in the process of writing poetry. These are:

- Imagination: this may include the initial intuitive processes which lead to the creative urge to write, and the various associative processes and insights which follow at various stages of the cycle and emerge from imaginative and

reimaginative processes which lead to the framing of the poem within an imaginative space.

- Structuration: where what is imagined is codified in language and image and formed into an initial draft. Formed here may mean loosely formed in terms of structure and idea – especially in the early iterations of the cycle.
- Analysis of the draft, which involves reading and interpreting what has been written. This may make use of a number of strategies, including readerly as well as writerly interpretive strategies.
- Validation, which involves making a judgment on the text informed by the analytic process and which may lead to several outcomes, among them the perceived need for
- Refinement of the text which leads in turn to reimagination of that text in such a way as to restructure it in a more aesthetically or artistically satisfactory manner.

This cycle then repeats with each new draft, moving the text forward to completion or rejection. The outcome of any stage may constitute abandonment *for now*.

I have chosen to express the model as a hermeneutic spiral because closure may never be reached. The artist never fully understands their artwork, just as critics who seek to analyze it can never fully understand it. Just as the reader may return to the poem again and again, see something new, and reach another level of insight, so the poet can return to the poem and re-imagine it, reinterpret it and rewrite it as many times as they feel necessary, or, perhaps more accurately, until they can do nothing further with it at that time.
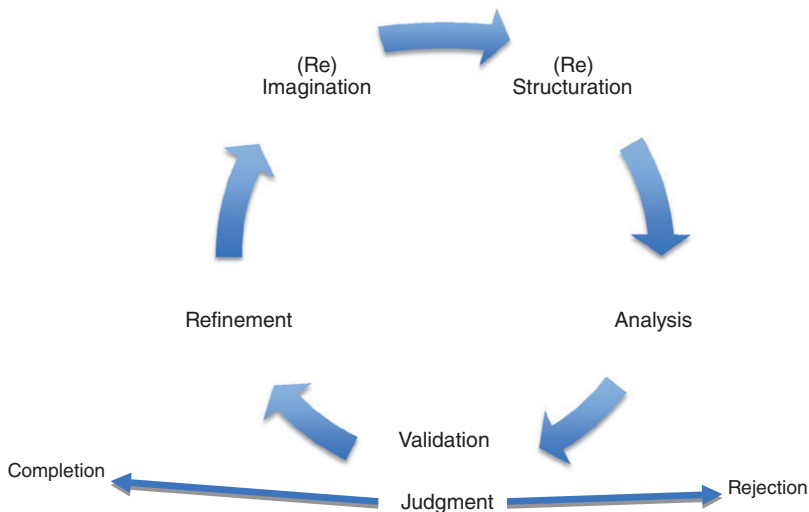
Figure 3.1 The drafting process

The poet is, after all, the first reader of the poem, and no poet can know the entirety of their own meaning because of the plethora of subconscious influences and processes that go into the making of the text. They may be intuitively aware of some influences and processes that they are consciously unable to articulate. The poet may proceed by the same interpretive mechanism as the reader in order to tease out the various possible meanings in the text. The difference, of course, is that the poet reads for a different purpose than the reader; the poet reads and interprets with a view to improving the text. They read with a view to understanding the potential meanings of the text that a critical reader may find, but the poet may wish to alter the text so that it better reflects, closes off, or otherwise modifies those meanings.

The contingent nature of completion, abandonment and rejection is important, and often drafts that are set aside as incomplete or unsatisfactory may be revisited and improved; poems which have been published will be rewritten or redrafted sometimes years later. Excised lines or images that are rejected in the drafting of one poem may find their way into another later poem and gain acceptance in the new poem. The process is fluid and mutable and the phases blur into each other. All of the skills discussed in the last section are integrally involved at all phases. The process is highly recursive, iterative and flexible. Any separation is arbitrary. How the process appears depends very much upon what one privileges. I have chosen to privilege process over artifact and artist.

The reason I have chosen to approach the process of poetic composition and editing in this way stems from theoretical and epistemological concerns. Poetry and poetics are, for me, a set of tools by which I understand the world, and through which I hope to make others understand how the world appears to me. All theoretical perspectives are underpinned by epistemology. In fact Crotty goes so far as to define epistemology explicitly in those terms: he calls it "the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology" (3). Constructionist epistemology holds that all knowledge and therefore all meaningful reality is contingent on human practices. Poetry is one such human practice. Knowledge is constructed in and out of social interactions between human beings and the world they encounter. Such knowledge is developed and transmitted in an essentially social context.

Constructionism demands that the world and the objects in the world become partners with the intending subject in the construction of meaning. Intending here is used in its root form of "reaching out into." The intending subject reaches out into the world to make meaning through interaction with the objects that the intending subject encounters. I define the intending author as such a subject, reaching out to make meaning from experiences using the methods of their art in order to create knowledge about those experiences and about the art form in which they work and by which they understand. Intentionality offers interaction between subject and object. It is an intimate and active relationship between the intending subject and the object of intention. It also serves to summarize the relation between the poet as intending subject; the object, ideas and experiences in the world as the material with which the intending author interacts; the art form as means of intention and

understanding; and the artifact generated as the vehicle which communicates this intention, meaning, and understanding.

Any methodology we claim, and poetry I would argue is an artistic methodology, needs to be underpinned by a theoretical perspective, which Crotty defined as "the philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria" (3). Constructionism underpins interpretivist theoretical perspectives. We all construct the world as we perceive it through the sets of beliefs we hold about the world. These perspectives are based on the assumption that there is no "objective" reality waiting to be discovered but that human beings construct their reality through interpretive processes, which are mediated by language and preconceptions. Symbolic interactionism, hermeneutics and phenomenology are subdivisions of this type of theoretical perspective. The process of writing poetry can and does make use of these.

Symbolic interactionism is founded on three assumptions. First that human beings act toward things they encounter on the basis of the meaning those things have for them; secondly, that the meanings those things have are constructed through social processes; and thirdly, that such meanings are handled in and modified through interpretive processes (Blumer 3). The process of writing poetry, then, is an interpretive process whereby the poet may engage with their experiences and make meaning from them in order to transform them into material for verbal art. Such meanings can be constructed and modified through the process of writing. Writing poetry (and other forms of creative writing) may be viewed as an investigative process that is capable of generating new knowledge not only in relation to poetics and aesthetics but also in relation to human experience through the process of "reaching out into" those experiences in order to understand them.

The recursive and iterative nature of the hermeneutic cycle produces new knowledge and understanding in both domain-relevant and creativity-relevant skills. It also produces knowledge related to motivational factors. The various processes that produce these knowledges can be in part unconscious, associative and tacit. The knowledges produced may often be tacit and implicit rather than explicit. However, such implicit and tacit knowledges and many of the processes that produce them can be made available for analysis and question through the critical reflective process, and it is to this critical reflective process I turn in the next section.

Poetry as Discovery in Action

Hermeneutics can be understood as a process whereby the interpreter of the text uncovers layers of meanings and intentions of which the author remains oblivious. I would argue that since the poet acts as the first reader (and first critic) of any text that they generate, and since they act as reader and critic iteratively and recursively, then the process of writing is in part a hermeneutic one. In many creative writing research projects part of that research is to tease out hidden meanings and intentions

through the poet analyzing their own text, with regard to inspirations, influences and writing processes. These may find their way unconsciously into the text in the act of writing, but the Ph.D. student, and the creative writing researcher, through the act of writerly analysis of their own text is obliged to make them explicit, reflect on them, analyze and examine them. It will be argued that this is always an incomplete hermeneutic process. There will always be meanings and intentions that elude the poet. That may well be true, but it does not invalidate the effort of the poet in better understanding the text they have produced and the processes that produced it. In any case, any hermeneutic analysis, no matter who conducts it, will only generate a partial reading since readers and critics other than the author are fallible too.

As shown in the previous section, the cycle involved in the poet's attempts at making meaning is an iterative and recursive cycle of writing and analysis designed to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct meaning and intentions in order to improve the work. This too is subject to interpretivist strategies, which are underpinned by the preconceived ideas the poet holds relating to theoretical poetics and aesthetics that dictate how the poet interprets the quality of their own work and even what is worth writing at all. Understanding that, I would argue, is also a form of hermeneutic inquiry.

Poets reflect critically on their poetics and on their processes. These may be further subdivided into reflection on elements of craft and how these elements may be experimented with, and reflection on elements of theoretical poetics and what the author believes makes a good text. The author reflects critically on the imaginative processes of making text; their influences and how those have been assimilated; and on their critical processes and the theories that underpin them. All of these critical reflective processes may generate new knowledge of the phenomena to which they relate as well as to the nature of "being in the world" (Heidegger) in relation to the poet; the phenomenon that poet seeks to understand; and the interpretive relation between them. One could therefore make the connection with phenomenological and phenomenographical approaches to research in that Larrabee asserted that phenomenological research is "a reflective enterprise, and in its reflection it is critical" (201) and phenomenological approaches have been defined by Marton as being concerned with "description, analysis, and understanding of . . . experiences" (180).

Assuming that the process of making poetry generates various forms of knowledge, there must be research methods by which we generate such knowledge. Research methods are defined by Crotty as "the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyse data related to some research question or hypothesis" (3). Such a definition immediately presents poets (and other creative artists) with a problem: what constitutes "data" and "analysis" in such disciplines? How may such data be validated? Data can be defined as pieces of information in a raw or unorganized form. Analysis is defined as the examination and evaluation of information. Therefore, one could define the process of making poetry as a research method because the information and experiences one gathers together to form the text may be construed as data. The making of the poetic text then becomes the method whereby the raw data of experience are

validated, ordered, examined and evaluated. To qualify as "research" the resulting poem should generate demonstrably new perspectives on either the experiences themselves or on the process of ordering, examining and evaluating experiences through poetry. These "results" can then be discussed either by the researcher in an exegesis or by a critic in the public domain.

Pinnegar and Daynes suggest that narrative can be both the method and the phenomenon of study. If we apply this to the generation of creative narratives, then the potential exists for the new knowledge that is generated to be new knowledge about the method of writing as the phenomenon of study. For example a poem may generate new knowledge through what it tells us thematically; about how the narrative elements are developed; how metaphor and imagery work; and it may generate a new or revised method of making poems that may be used or further adapted in the future. Creswell offers a variety of narrative research techniques, including oral histories, biography, autobiography, and "restorying" or retelling a story in a new form, attending to chronology, disruptions, or silences. All of these strategies are used in the making of poems and other forms of verbal art.

Methodology is defined as "the strategy, plan of action, process, or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcome" (Crotty 3). I define Creative Writing in all its forms as a research methodology because it consists in the strategic selection and deployment of an integrated set of creative methods toward the creation of an original textual artifact which manifests something new in terms of the way the world is represented, or in terms of the medium through which we have chosen to make that representation manifest as verbal art. If the process of making poetry can be thought of as a research methodology as defined above, then so can the process of making any other verbal art form, and of course, we may employ more than one type of verbal art in the making of text and take techniques and elements from the making of one verbal art and apply them to another.

As a discipline we also produce other types of texts and these require other methods. Some of the main types of text we produce are the various forms of exegesis. To give one example, an exegesis may engage in an autoethnographic analysis of the creative process of making the creative text, but autoethnography offers a creative application also. According to Ellis, autoethnography is "Research, writing, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social. This form usually features concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection . . . [and] claims the conventions of literary writing" (xix). Holman Jones refers to the processes of "weaving intricate connections among life and art, experience and theory, evocation and explanation" (765). That could also describe how poetry, and writing about poetry, engage with the research process. The writing of poetry could be said under these terms to be, at base, an autoethnographic process. It implies that autoethnography could be used as an overarching methodology under which various methods of writing are deployed strategically to achieve the desired outcome.

The main problem with autoethnography is the danger that the "research" descends into mere autobiography. This can be particularly true of the exegesis, and the analytic quality of this methodology should be foregrounded. The distinction can be made quite easily: if we take the example of the autoethnographic exegesis on the creative process alluded to above, the writer's journal, and the various interim texts such as drafts and notes, should form the raw data from which autoethnographic analysis should facilitate the development of new knowledge related to the process of writing, in relation to models and theories regarding the creative process. The knowledge so generated should be generalizable, genuinely analytic, synthetic and evaluative, and not merely an autobiographical account of what was done.

Another methodology that suggests itself as particularly relevant to creative disciplines is heuristic research. Douglass and Moustakas define the methodology as "a search for the discovery of meaning and essence in significant human experience" (40). They intimate that as a methodology it "is concerned with meanings, not measurements; with essence, not appearance; with quality, not quantity; with experience, not behaviour" (42). Moustakas outlined the phases of heuristic research as follows: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, creative synthesis, and validation of the heuristic research. These may be directly compared to the stages in the creative process as outlined by Wallas: preparation, incubation, intimation, illumination and verification. Wallas's model has been a strong influence for most models of the creative process.

The heuristic approach is related to, and adapted from, phenomenological inquiry, but concentrates on the lived experience of the researcher and the transformative effects of enquiry on the researcher as the main focus of the research. There are obvious parallels to the processes involved in the production of creative text and the transformation of lived experience through poetry into art, as well as the exegetical exploration of that process. All of the above suggests that writing poetry could be considered as a research methodology that contains elements of autoethnographic, heuristic and hermeneutic research methods.

Poetry as a Cycle of Making Knowledge

There is another type of cycle that overlays the cycle of production, of which poet-academics need to be aware, and which may be used to outline how creative pieces (in our case, poems) can function in terms of the cycle of knowledge generation through research. This is shown in Figure 3.2, where the normal stages in the research process in social science are marked in bold and the analogous phases in the process of writing poems have been mapped onto them underneath. Common to both processes are a background literature that must be explored and understood both at a technical and thematic level, and a lacuna, or gap in the current knowledge, found in order to avoid the practitioner (poet or researcher) either experimentally or poetically reinventing the wheel.
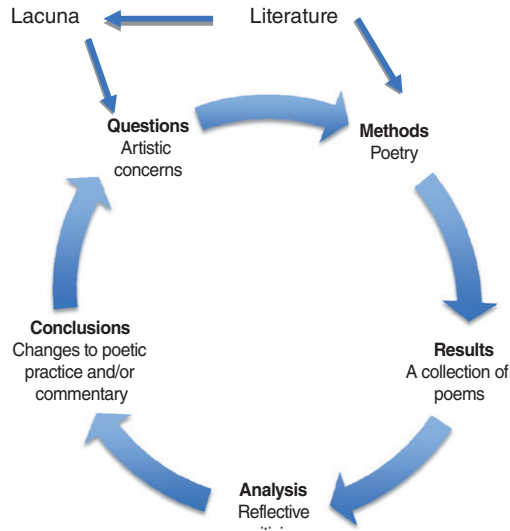
Figure 3.2 Cycle of research

   This gap leads to research questions. In the case of the poet, the research questions are often ill-defined and intuitive, as they are in many creative endeavors, and are often only articulated through much reflection on inspiration, motivation and influence. Often these questions relate to how certain subjects may be approached through poetry in original ways, what new knowledge can be generated with regard to form or trope by using certain approaches to poetry. These are demonstrated in the writing of the poems and articulated and further explored in the commentary. Often the poet is concerned with how the process of transforming experience into art proceeds in relation to the proposed poetic project. These are all interesting questions that have the potential to generate new sets of knowledge in the art of poetry; and as such are research questions.

   Through poetry the data of experience are collected in the imagination, validated and analyzed through the creative process of making poems. The poet validates the data of particular experience through their knowledge of craft and the current literature as being useful raw material which is capable of offering new knowledge in the exploration, through poetry, of similar experiences more generally. The poet may also develop new knowledge in the method of poetry by offering new means of analyzing and shaping experience in the poetic medium. This will be subject to external scrutiny by peer review when the result of the process of poetry (the poem or collection of poems) is published.

   The process of analysis takes the results of the methodology and subjects them to reflective criticism; this may be reflection by the poet for the purpose of improvement of the poems, but it may also be reflective criticism for the purposes of writing a preface or other account of the poems – academic poets are often asked for a justification of how their work qualifies as research in the research assessment exercise for

example. Or it may be that the collection of poems, like a significant number of collections at the present time, is being written for a higher degree in creative writing. In that case, an additional analytical process is required to produce a commentary where conclusions are drawn regarding the collection's context within contemporary writing and what it adds to the contemporary poetic knowledge base. This includes an analytical critical reflection on aspects of the composition process which may not have gone as planned, or on aspects of the poems produced which were not as successful or satisfying for the author as they might have been. The conclusions drawn from this analysis may be made explicitly manifest in a thesis commentary, or more usually and more generally, they may be used to inform future projects by that poet.

In academia the quality of research is validated by those who undertake assessments of research quality and through the system of expert external examiners. Outside of the academy the process of peer review provides another type of validation for the research undertaken, through experts in the field judging the artifact in terms of the new knowledge that it adds to the domain of poetry and/or poetics. Both of these validation procedures can be seen in terms of Csikszentmihalyi's tripartite model of domain, field, and individual artist, whereby the field judges what is sufficiently novel and appropriate (creative) and allows the artifact so adjudged to be added to the domain. The fact that something is judged fit to be added to the domain implies that new knowledge related to the domain inheres in the artifact. This new knowledge can be explicitly articulated through the review process or it may remain implicitly present for a time and be articulated later through demonstrable influence among successor poets. Such knowledge will form part of the succeeding literature precisely because it has addressed a previous lacuna. However, it should be remembered that this is not a neutral process due to the conservative pressures exerted by the field.

In this chapter I have attempted to offer ways of thinking about the process of writing poetry as knowledge generation and attempted to question and explore some of the ways in which it generates knowledges and what those knowledges are. I have attempted to demonstrate that the artistic process of making poems is a research process; that it is involved in the rigorous pursuit of new knowledge within the domain of poetry and poetics; and that the process may be mapped onto more traditional research processes. I hope that I have provided a useful framework for looking at the composition of poetry and one that may spark further work, ideas and discussion.

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4
Writing for Children and Young Adults

Kathleen Ahrens

Writing for children and young adults is immensely exciting and rewarding. It's exciting because children and young adults live in the here and now, so the writer is charged with creating a world in which the protagonist lives with intensity. It's immensely rewarding because writers for children know they are opening doors to new worlds and new experiences for their readers. They know that if they succeed in drawing a reader into their story and engaging them so intensely that they can't put the book down, they have then succeeded in changing a life, because that child now has experienced a new world, point of view, or problem outside of their own field of experience. Furthermore, the child realizes – perhaps without even explicating it to herself – that she has brought her own imaginative self to the book. Unlike with other forms of media, the relationship between a reader and the book is intensely personal, and the writer for children is charged with a unique responsibility of making that relationship rewarding.

However, as in any creative endeavor, to write well for children is also challenging. It's challenging not only because children deserve our very best, but also because children demand the best. They know what they want – protagonists who face real or even extraordinary problems and who solve those problems for themselves. Furthermore, they want to feel and understand and see and hear what that protagonist is experiencing. They are not impressed by flowery language and breathtaking scene description. They will throw down any book that rings untrue – if the protagonist is a goody-goody, if an adult is around to solve the protagonist's problems, or if the dialogue contains old-fashioned slang when the setting is in the present.

In what follows, I will present four steps writers can take in order to find success in writing for publication in the children's and young adult market: know the market, understand your audience, familiarize yourself with the resources available to you, and determine where you fit in. With this information in hand, you will be well on your way to connecting with children and teens through your stories, and in the process, greatly enriching their field of experience as well as your own.

Overview of the Children's and Young Adult Market

Children's literary agents usually divide the market into three broad categories: picture books, middle-grade novels, and young adult novels. These categories are usually divided first in terms of illustration, as picture books are illustrated while the other two categories are not, and then further divided by age as middle-grade novels are written broadly for those between the ages of 8 and 12, while young adult novels are written for those aged 12 and above.

Picture books

Picture books are illustrated texts for children age 7 and under. When people think of children's literature, they often immediately think of picture books, and they often think that they are easy to write, because there are so few words in a picture book. Picture books used to be somewhere between 800 and 1,200 words of text, with a maximum of 1,500 words for some publishers. This is no longer the case. Nowadays, picture books geared toward children age 3 to 5 are 500 words or less, and publishers prefer "longer" picture books to be no more than 700 words.

Middle-grade novels

Middle-grade (MG) novels are written for children ages 8 through 12. At the lower age range, they may be 20,000 to 30,000 words. At the upper age range they may go up to 40,000 words, with up to 60,000 words for fantasy novels. Children in this age range like to read up. What that means is that the characters in the novel can be slightly older than the actual audience. So if you're writing a book for the 8 to 10 year old age group, the protagonist could be age 11 or 12. For those in the 10 to 12 year old age group, the protagonists could be 13 to 14 years old. Children this age have recently become fluent readers, and in the best case scenario, they are voracious readers. If they're lucky, at this stage teachers will be encouraging them to read as part of their homework assignments. In addition, the library and school market is important for sales in this age group, and author visits are a real treat for children in this age range. Since these books may be housed in both middle school/junior high

and elementary school libraries, authors often select their words carefully – saying that a character "swore," for example, rather than giving the exact swearword. In addition, romantic scenes, if any, are often chastely described.

Young adult novels

Young adult (YA) novels are written for children aged 12 and up and usually range from 45,000 to 90,000 words. Anything goes in the genre – the writing can be literary or can be edgy; it can be sophisticated; it can involve paranormal elements or dystopian elements. MG and YA can be distinguished by the age of the protagonist and word count, as well as by the complexity of the issues the protagonist deals with. For example, violence may be much darker and more personalized in young adult fiction than in middle-grade fiction – compare, for example, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (the first novel in a dystopian YA trilogy) with the middle-grade *Percy Jackson* series by Rick Riordan. To give another example, middle-grade novels may involve a romantic relationship, but it might only culminate in a kiss, while young adult novels may portray and/or discuss sexual relationships. However, as bestselling MG/YA author Meg Cabot (author of the series *The Princess Diaries*) points out in an interview in the *2012 Children's Writer's and Illustrator's Market* (Sambuchino), her YA novels have been withdrawn from middle-school libraries because they included the word "condom" or "french kiss."

   Of course, young adult novels do not need to be bound by the dictates of the library. As teens often have control of their own purse strings, they freely buy and download novels that appeal to them. Young adult fiction itself has been out of the children's sections in bookstores for around two decades now, precisely because teens (and adults) didn't want to have to walk past picture books to search for their favorite vampire series. In addition, because many adults are avid consumers of this genre, agents sometimes pitch young adult novels to publishing houses as "crossover" fiction – fiction that will be bought by both teens and adults, usually with different book covers for each market. While some agents may say that there is no difference between YA fiction and fiction written for adults, others note that YA novels often are written in the first-person or in such a way that the immediateness of the situation and the emotions accompanying the situation are viscerally felt by the reader. As editor Stephen Roxburgh points out in his article on "The Art of the Young Adult Novel," "Voice is character is plot. *This* is the very essence of the young adult novel."

Early readers, board books, and graphic novels

There are three other categories of books that are often found in the library and on the bookshelves: early readers/chapter books, board books, and graphic novels. Many

writers ask about the in-between area of early readers and chapter books. These are books for the 6 to 8 year old set – those in the grades of kindergarten and first grade who are learning to read. This genre is not usually open to aspiring children's book writers, as books in this category are often written by middle-grade authors whose publishing house has asked them to write for a slightly younger audience, with slightly shorter stories. One example of this phenomenon is the *39 Clues* series which is authored by a number of well-known middle-grade authors, including Newbery Award-winning author Linda Sue Park. Series themselves are often created in-house, or publishers approach well-known authors with a series idea (or well-known authors approach publishers).

In addition, there is also a category called board books, which are picture books for the very young, made out of very thickly constructed cardboard pages. These books are often created in-house by publishing companies by shortening and reformatting existing picture books, or they are created by illustrators who usually have some sort of relationship already with the publishing house.

Graphic novels have been described as book-length comic books. However, graphic novels do not necessarily follow story arcs traditionally found in comic books, nor do they rely on a particular type of drawing style or medium for their illustrations. Instead, they are a unique type of book for older readers that melds illustrations in a six-panel format with text that is written within each panel. Examples of this genre are *American Born Chinese*, by Gene Luen Yang, *Blankets* by Craig Thompson, and the *Sandman* Series by Neil Gaiman. In addition, many popular novels, such as the *Alex Rider* series (Anthony Horowitz) or the *Artemis Fowl* series (Eoin Colfer), are republished in graphic novel format.

What the future holds

In order to know truly know your market, you need to see what is currently being published and what will be published in the future. To know what is currently out there means spending time in bookstores and online to see what readers are reading. But the books in the bookstore today are those that were bought by editors two years ago. In order to see what's being bought today by editors, one solution is to go to Publishers Marketplace (http://www.publishersmarketplace.com/). There is a small monthly fee to access this database, but it can be a very valuable investment, as you only need to pay for one month and during that month you can see all the deals that have recently been made in children's book publishing (as well as in other markets), including the agent who sold the work, how much it was sold for, which publisher acquired it, and what the pitch was for that particular property. With this information in hand, you can then evaluate if your own writing interests fit in to the young adult, middle-grade, or picture book genres. In addition, you can see which agents would be a good fit for your work, and modify your own pitches in your query letters accordingly.

Audience Analysis

While adult books often have multiple readers, including an agent, an editor, and various reviewers, they are all adults reading manuscripts by and about other adults. Writers for children, however, have a more challenging task. On the one hand, they are writing to engage and entertain their intended readership. But in order to get to those readers they often must first pass through a gauntlet of adult readers, including agents, editors, and reviewers as well as librarians, teachers, and parents. Obviously, writers of young adult books may be less constrained in this regard as teenagers can either download or buy books directly, but for younger readers or for readers using the local or school libraries, a writer needs to be sensitive to the expectations of the adult readers as well as their intended audience. In what follows, I will briefly review the developmental stages of childhood and how this impacts what children are reading during these periods. In addition, I will also discuss the expectations of both the child reader and their well-meaning gatekeepers.

Children

Children begin listening to voices in the womb, and begin to coo and respond verbally before the age of 6 months. At this age, they often respond to rhythmic language and songs. Between the ages of 6 and 18 months they will begin to speak, first in mono-syllables and then in words and word chunks. Books with repetition, point-and-say books, object/concept books, and books with clear plots are received well at this age. From two years of age onward, children will begin to gravitate to stories that include families, everyday problems, and challenges appropriate for their developmental level, including object permanence (Donald Crews, *Freight Train*), the feeling of safety or fear when transitioning to sleep (Sam McBratney, *Guess How Much I Love You*, and Margaret Wise Brown, *Goodnight Moon*), not being allowed to do something (Mo Willems, *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus*), and having difficulty doing something (Nancy Shaw, *Sheep in a Jeep*).

  Because the content is viewed by adults as conceptually facile, well-written picture books themselves look deceptively simple. In fact, writers often struggle with the short word count for two reasons: First, it is very difficult to write an emotionally engaging story encompassing character development and plot arc in only a few hundred words, especially when those words need to flow in such a way that the book can be read hundreds of times (Ahrens, "Picture Books"). One of best examples of a picture book that meets these criteria is the classic *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak, which has fewer than 400 words in total. Second, unless the writer is also a professional illustrator (as Sendak was), and submits both the story and text together, the writer must rely solely on the story text to get his or her ideas across to first the editor and later the illustrator. But the rub is that the writer only has a limited number of words. Moreover, the pictures should ideally complement the text, and not

repeat visually what has already been written. What writers often run up against is a static text; that is, one in which there is not much action, and the illustrator is left to illustrate two talking heads. One way to overcome this problem is to storyboard your manuscript in the same way an illustrator would do it, by placing the text and simple sketches (in a writer's case, very simple sketches) of the illustration on the page (Shulevitz; for an explanation that can be found online, see http://www.mightyart-demos.com/mightyartdemos-shulevitz.html). This will allow you to see if the illustrator has something new to illustrate on each double-page spread and it will also allow you to see if your text is evenly distributed or not.

However, editors do not want authors to submit unprofessionally illustrated manuscripts, even if it is just to show the idea of what the author has in mind, so your storyboard is only for your own reference – the illustrator may do something else entirely with your manuscript. This is because the illustrator is an equal partner in the picture book endeavor, and brings his or her own unique insight to its creation. On the one hand, this is what makes picture books a unique art form – the collaboration between the writer and the illustrator, along with the aid given by the editor and art director and book designer at the publishing house. On the other hand, it can be highly frustrating for a writer to have a fabulous vision of what a picture book might look like, only for that dream never to be realized because he or she lacks the necessary illustration skills.

Of course, once the editor decides to acquire a picture book text with a well-written, emotionally satisfying story that lends itself to being read aloud multiple times, then the text is passed to an art director, who looks for an appropriate illustrator. In large houses, book designers also come into play, helping to determine the size and layout and fonts used in the finished product.

All in all, publishing a picture book requires a substantial amount of capital, and given that there are a number of well-loved picture books firmly entrenched in the buyer's psyche, editors are often reluctant to take on a nonillustrated picture book manuscript. When asked, editors say they are looking for unique, short books that allow both the parent reader and the young child to view the world in a different way. In this light, personification of animals, holiday themes, pets, bedtime, going to grandma's house, and other common topics such as going on vacation, or the first day of school, are a difficult sell. Rhyme also is a difficult sell, because it is so hard to do well. The writer must have control of not only rhyme but also meter. Editors often complain that the writer lets the story wander off in order to keep to the rhyme scheme. That's the kiss of death for any story, but especially so for a story that's only a few hundred words in length.

As of the writing of this chapter, picture books are still primarily being sold in hardcover and soft cover formats, but as devices which support digital versions of books grow in popularity, increase in features, and decrease in price, this may change. However, to date there is still a strong demand for the hardcover version, as buyers want to hold the book in their hands, share it with their children, and pass it on to the next generation.

Pre-teens

Children aged 8–12 (the prototypical ages for readers of middle-grade novels) have learned how to read fluently, and most of them enjoy and revel in the newfound freedom this gives them. Their world is one full of questions and big ideas. They're struggling with learning new things: long division, how to skateboard, when to stay away from their older sister, how to hit a baseball. Children this age are dealing with conflicting feelings: on the one hand they want to define who they are as individuals, and on the other hand they realize they also want to find a peer group. Sometimes they want to make choices for themselves, choices that they don't want their parents to make for them. But at the same time they often want to feel safe and protected and know that their parents or guardians will set guidelines and boundaries for them. They are also beginning to grapple with issues related to puberty, and the onset of hormonal changes which exacerbate feelings of self-consciousness about their changing bodies. As their theory of mind is still developing, they are often self-centered, and fail to see the long-range implications of their actions, leading to poor decision-making, which then entails negative consequences.

Many pre-teens often gravitate to one genre: historical fiction for those who are history buffs, or science fiction for those who are science mavens, or adventure for those who like sports and thrills. Of course, pre-teens may gravitate to a particular genre precisely because it so different from what they already know, and as many authors have found out, well-written fantasy is a huge draw for kids who want to experience the world in a different way. In terms of contemporary fiction, nowadays middle-grade fiction often involves the nitty-gritty of real life: the effects of divorce, child abuse, or bullying. However, both the agents and editors acquiring fiction that involves real life issues and those gatekeeping for children, including librarians and parents, are looking for novels that balance realism with a sense of hope.

Authors who write for this age group often seek to tie their novels to the curriculum in some way – which allows their books to receive a sales boost based on recommendations from teachers and librarians. However, many children naturally gravitate to what they perceive to be lighter fare, including fantasy, spying, and light romance. Meg Cabot is an example of an author who has cornered the middle-grade market for light romance with her *Princess Diaries* series, while Eoin Colfer has millions of fans with his fantasy series about a boy genius who learns about the fairy world (*Artemis Fowl*), and Ally Carter has a best-selling series about spies (Gallagher Girls). In all these series, as in most books written for children, the protagonist is a child dealing independently with problems, often large problems involving malevolent antagonists that would be difficult for most adults to handle.

While the potential rewards of a series are great, agents often caution that it's better to create a stand-alone novel that then receives such attention and demand that a follow-up book is written. The danger of selling the series is that if the first book doesn't deliver, the second book won't receive much support and it will be a downward spiral from there.

In terms of setting, it's not advisable to set a story in the past just because you know that period of time better; there has to be a compelling reason for the story to take place during that place and time. While children enjoy reading contemporary stories that were written in the 1970s or 1980s (for instance, Judy Blume, Beverly Cleary, and Paula Danzinger are perennial favorite authors for pre-teens), books published today need to have a compelling reason to set them in the world of yesterday. Teachers and parents also note that once boys reach the age of 10, or the upper middle-grade years, they often turn away from reading as avidly and widely as they did between the ages of 8 and 10. They often talk of the need for more fantasy and adventure and science fiction to keep boys reading as they enter their teen years. While novelists including Anthony Horowitz, Rick Riordan, and Eoin Colfer are doing their best to fill this need, there is always room in the marketplace for stories that set the heart racing and show the possibilities of believing in oneself and one's future.

Teens

Young adults live in a world of possibilities and electrifying "firsts" that are stepping stones to their adult lives. They may be learning how to drive; they may be exposed to alcohol and drugs and need to choose how to react; they are stepping into different worlds to see how their identity fits in with these worlds, and oftentimes they are being tested implicitly or explicitly to see if they are allowed to enter these worlds. In addition, romance plays a big role in their lives (or in their imagined lives), and the tiniest shake of the other person's head can swing their mood from dark to ecstatic.

Agents and editors remind authors that in all children's literature the protagonist should be the one in charge, but for this age range in particular it is critical to give the protagonists control over their lives and over their decisions. They will, as all teens do, make mistakes and struggle in the absence of adult help, or struggle against well-meaning (or malevolent) adults. So when you write for this age group, show how the protagonist decides for himself or herself what is right and wrong and give your character problems – the problems don't need to be life-threatening to an adult who has lived through adolescence, but they need to be life-threatening to the character who is trapped in the throes of adolescence. In addition, keep in mind that teens don't necessarily have the perspective of an adult, and thus might not view a serious problem as darkly as an adult might.

Young adult endings don't need to have a cozy warm fuzzy resolution. They can be realistic and involve the ideas of sacrifice and complexity that are attached to adult decision-making and the consequences of those decisions. The critical point for young adult literature is that there needs to be a strong character, and that character needs to have a clear, unique voice – a voice that the reader identifies with on some level. Once these elements fall in place, the character and the character's problems will serve to move the story along. That is not to say that more plot-based or action-based novels are unappreciated by this age group – they certainly are. But these readers understand

that for every action there is a reaction. And they want to see and feel that reaction. There is no magic formula to help their protagonist escape.

Lastly, aim for complexity and depth in a YA novel. Don't be afraid to have the protagonist ask tough questions – the big ones about life, and love, and the reason for persevering even in the face of overwhelming odds. This leads, of course, to the question of where the actual line is between novels for young adults and novels for adults. One guideline that I've heard given by more than one agent is that writing for young adults is never exploitative – the reader does not look at the cruel predicament the protagonist is in and laugh mockingly. For example, the protagonist in *The Hunger Games* is put in an awful predicament of having to kill other teens and children – and she's put there by adults who are legally (under the rules of their society) exploiting these children in order to brutally control their society. The novel is written from the point of view of the protagonist who finds this extremely unfair and who fights bravely to save her family and friends. As readers, we sympathize with her predicament and root for her success.

Recommended Resources

In this chapter, I have only been able to give a brief overview of what's involved in writing for children and young adults. Fortunately, there is a lot of information available for you to dig deeper and learn more about the art and craft of writing for children and young adults.

Books

The annual Children's Writer's and Illustrator's Market (Sambuchino), published by Writer's Digest, provides a wealth of articles about writing for children and young adults, along with interviews with authors and editors or agents. It also lists the markets, agents, organizations, conferences, writing contests, and book awards that are relevant for children's writers. It comes with an automatic one-year writersmarket.com subscription as well.

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Publishing Children's Books (Underdown) is a good reference to turn to if you are very new to writing and the publishing world in general. What's notable about this book is that a select portion of its material can be found online for free at http://www.underdown.org/cig.htm, and in addition, Underdown's site ("The Purple Crayon") also has a wealth of information (http://www.underdown.org/) including "Who's moving where?" with update info about the children's book publishing industry and the movement of its editors.

Writing picture books is difficult to do well because there is so much that needs to be taken into consideration to draft a manuscript that has the potential to be illustrated. Molly Bang (*Picture This*) has an excellent introductory text on the illustrative

elements of a picture book which writers may find useful when faced with drafting their own storyboard, helping them to analyze the pacing in their manuscript, and to understand visual effects in general. Bine-Stock's *How to Write a Children's Picture Book* has three volumes on structure, scene, and figures of speech. She focuses particularly on the structural pacing and the word choice in picture books and the examples she provides should help writers understand the complexity of language and structure in picture book texts and, at the same time, suggest ways for writers to assess their own work.

Once your manuscript is completed, Paul's *Writing Picture Books* leads writers step-by-step through the revision process to create an even tighter manuscript. For picture book, MG, and YA writers, Scholastic editor Cheryl Klein's book of compiled essays has valuable suggestions on how to approach revisions, and samples of revision letters she has sent to her own authors.

Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

The Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) is a nonprofit professional organization for children's writers and illustrators which has over 60 regions throughout the United States as well as over 20 regions outside the US, including the British Isles, Australia, France, Germany, Japan, Hong Kong, and South Africa. Each region holds a variety of events for their members, including critique opportunities and networking opportunities with industry professionals. The website itself (www.scbwi.org) also has a special section reserved for members which provides a wealth of information relating to educational, religious, mainstream, and international markets, and members also have opportunities to submit their unpublished and published work for a variety of awards (Ahrens, "A Worldwide Network").

Websites

In addition to the websites mentioned already in this chapter, author Verla Kay runs a bulletin board service for children's writers at http://www.verlakay.com/boards/index.php. The boards are active and good information can be culled from the posts, or if you follow the procedures to join, you can ask your own questions. Two authors have also put together an excellent website that contains a growing list of interviews with children's agents at http://www.literaryrambles.com.

Courses and M.F.A. programs

Many universities, including those in the University of California system and the University of Washington, offer extension courses related to writing for children. In

addition, online options include the Institute for Children's Literature (http://www. institutechildrenslit.com/) and websites that offer adult as well as children's writing courses, such as Media Bistro (http://www.mediabistro.com/courses/) and Gotham Writers' Workshops (http://www.writingclasses.com). In addition, there are many Master of Fine Arts programs that specialize in writing for children and young adults, including the low-residency M.F.A. program at the Vermont College of Fine Arts (http://www.vcfa.edu/low-residency-mfa/writing-children-young-adults) and the full-time program at Simmons College (http://www.simmons.edu/gradstudies/programs/childrens-literature/writing.php).

Review journals

If your book is published by a traditional, mainstream publisher, once it goes out into the world, it will be reviewed by librarians, teachers and experts in the field of children's literature. Reading these reviews is a good way to see the trends in the field, and find out what books are recommended by these experts. The following journals are all good places to start and can usually be found in the public library: *Booklist* (American Library Association), *The Horn Book Magazine*, *Kirkus Reviews*, *School Library Journal*, *Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)*, *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, and the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* (International Reading Association).

Where You Fit In

Writers write fiction because they have a story to tell. Whether they write science fiction, romance, literary fiction, or gothic horror, their goal is usually publication for an adult audience involving adults in the publishing company, adult reviewers, adult booksellers, and adult readers. Writers for children, as I mentioned above, have a more complex task because if a writer takes the route of the traditional publishing model, only after the manuscript and later the book has been vetted by a great number of well-educated professionals in a variety of fields will it fall into the hands of a child or teen. Thus, a writer for children and young adults needs to be able to satisfy multiple audiences with their story in order to reach publication, and later have successful sales.

Alternate routes to publication

There is another way, of course. Since the early twenty-first century authors have been able to publish their stories directly in a digital format, or else they can take the self-publishing route, or the vanity publishing route, and have their book published in small quantities. Describing these three approaches to publication would take more

space than I have in this short chapter, and most cases usually meet the same constraints as adult manuscripts that follow the same routes – with the exception of picture books, which would require the addition of an illustrator and book designer to bring an independent project to fruition. However, if you are thinking about taking an alternate route to publication, it is useful to first ask yourself the reason why you want to write for children. Do you want to reach a specific group of children directly and immediately? Do you already have a particular audience in mind? For example, a grandmother who wants to share adventurous tales of her life with her grandchildren, or an elementary school teacher who wants to create stories that would work well with the content he is teaching in his classroom have built-in audiences. These writers may attain their goals more readily through e-publishing, self-publication or vanity publishing than through traditional publishing routes. In addition, stories that deal with specific topics, such as those related to second-language learning or those dealing with a specific disability may also be better suited to specialized markets, such as educational or academic publishers.

The traditional route to publication

If you do decide that you would like to take the traditional route to publication and publish with a major publisher, the next question many children's authors will ask themselves is whether they need an agent or not. Prior to the turn of the century the answer given by editors and writers in the field was mixed. At that point in time it was still possible for authors to create a steady relationship with an editor and simply have a contract lawyer to read over their contracts. But as of the early twenty-first century, the consensus at writers' conferences from editors and writers is that agents are very much needed, not only to act as a funnel to get the right manuscripts to the right editors, but also to nurture a stable relationship with an author, as editors nowadays often change houses or change careers midway through an author's career. In addition, agents help the writer navigate the tricky waters surrounding e-publishing and digital and subsidiary rights. Lists of agents that specialize in children's literature can be found on in the membership section of www.scbwi.org and www.writersmarket.com. The *Children's Writer's and Illustrator's Market* also lists agents. As with agents for adult writers, agents for children's writers should be screened carefully. In the United States, writers often check if an agent is a member of the Association of Authors' Representatives, or in the United Kingdom, of the Association of Authors' Agents.

Connecting with children and teens

Once you are published, be sure to consider taking the opportunity to meet with your audience through school visits and library events. Schools often welcome traditionally

published or successfully self-published writers who can talk about their own writing as well as offer workshops to students on various writing topics. If you like kids and are comfortable speaking to groups both large and small, school visits are a great way to learn more about your readers and promote interest in your books. As with all public presentations, practice is key – as are several contingency plans if the presentation doesn't go the way you expect it to. Students may ask personal questions; projectors have a way of not working on the day you arrive, and you may have a larger or smaller audience than anticipated based on unexpected scheduling issues.

Other ways of reaching your audience is to work with local librarians to set up events related to reading. Oftentimes, a group of authors get together to run a series of workshops on a weekend or to sign books at a local fair for fundraising efforts. One caveat: schoolteachers and librarians spread the word at conferences like the American Library Association (www.ala.org) and the National Council of Teachers of English (www.ncte.org) about authors who are fabulous to work with and those who are high maintenance. Speaking at schools and library events involves a great deal of communication and planning as well as a good deal of flexibility and a healthy ability to laugh at oneself. Usually though, authors return from these events exhausted, invigorated, and with more stories to tell.

In addition to writers and readers meeting in person, children and teens also like to meet authors online: websites, blogs, Facebook, Twitter – whatever the new medium or social network is, children and teens will be on it first. Note that because of the US Federal law (Children's Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998) regarding the collection of data from children under the age of 13, children's authors do not solicit email addresses on their websites to send out newsletters or updates to their readers unless they have a way of verifying the age of those who request to be on a mailing list (and since most don't, they forego this marketing tactic).

Your Voice, Your Story

How do you know if you've got what it takes to write for children and young adults? It's useful to approach this question by reflecting first on your own childhood and young adulthood and determining which period of time resonates most clearly in your own mind. For example, some questions you might ask yourself are the following: What issues did you face as a pre-teen or teenager? Did you encounter scholastic or sports or social achievements or failures? Did you have family issues or a best friend who moved away? A pet or family member who died? Did you create your own small business? Were you an emotional type of kid? Did you watch a lot of TV or were you involved in video games or role-playing games? Expand your circle of questions to include the experiences of your siblings or your friends or your own children or nieces or nephews. What are recurring themes, issues, and triumphs?

Next, how did you (or your siblings or children or nieces and nephews) handle these issues? Why did you handle those issues in that particular way? What were your

weaknesses and strengths as a pre-teen or teenager? What three incidents affected you most deeply growing up? What three incidents were your greatest triumphs as a pre-teen or as a teenager? Where did you get your sense of self-worth: from your peers, your external achievements in sports or school, your spiritual self, or your family?

After examining those questions and your feelings about responding to them (such as whether you enjoyed the trip down memory lane or whether it felt forced), also examine your own reading habits. For example, what did you enjoy reading most as a child or teen? Who were your favorite authors? What book did you read as a child that you wished you had written? What book or books did you read as a child that felt as if they were a part of you?

Follow up by reading extensively in the same genre that you enjoyed as a child, and this time focus on books published in the past five years. Does the genre still resonate with you? Do you like reading in the genre you are interested in? Are there books that make you feel as if you could have written them? What resonated with you in particular – the beauty of the language, the voice of the character, the speed with which the plot moved, or something else entirely? Of course, your tastes may have changed since you were a child; the point is to find the genre you enjoy reading and read as much as you can in that area, whether it is mid-grade fantasy, or YA paranormal romance, or rhyming picture books. Identify for yourself what works and doesn't work for you in each book you read, and think about what you would have done differently. All these reflections will aid you when it is time to revise your own work.

Asking questions like those suggested above and reliving in some sense the emotions that you felt at that age will help you connect with your younger self, and allow you to connect more viscerally with your readers. Children and teens don't want to be talked down to; they don't want things explained to them from the perspective of someone who has lived through it and is now looking back. They want to experience the emotions and the actions and the consequences that the protagonists are experiencing in that very moment. By understanding what was important for you as a child and teen, and what still resonates for you as an adult, you will be better able to find your niche in this demanding and rewarding market.

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5
Write On! Practical Strategies for Developing Playwriting

Peter Billingham

"To begin a new book – how wonderful, reminding one of those schooldays exercise books – white waved new oceans to be traversed, dive-bombing the imagination for the alchemy of poetry."

Do you want to write? Do you really want to write? Is writing like a persistent friend, or even sometimes, foe; which simply won't leave you alone? Whom you have to talk to, must talk to? Listen too, as well.

The short quote that opened this chapter is taken from one of the many writers' notebooks I've kept over the last 20 years or so. I've used it for two reasons. One is that if you're going to write, or already write, your territory is the human imagination: yours. There's nowhere else to go. It can be an exuberant and elating journey but it's also as often as not going to be challenging. The small boat of your writer's imagination and self-belief might frequently seem fragile. Vulnerable. Know the feeling? Sense the same waves of self-doubt and theaters' disinterest showering you with bitter sea-salt? Good!

Unless you know the creative challenges and practical problems facing you in getting your plays written, read by theaters, and produced, it might be better not to leave harbor in the first place. This is why I asked the question about your motivation to write. It has to be an overwhelming and unanswerable sense of need. This need will help to drive you on when the difficulties arise. It will also inspire your best and deepest creativity and writing. On the opening page of my notebook with its first entry dated New Years Day 2000, I'd scribbled the following short quote from the award-winning novelist Salman Rushdie: "A writer's injuries are his strengths and from his wounds will flow his sweetest, most startling dreams."

My other second reason in quoting from an old notebook is neither self-aggran-dizement nor a trip down memory lane. It is that I believe as an act of secular, crea-tive faith in the absolute necessity of keeping a writer's notebook or journal. It was advice first given to me 30 years ago when I first dared to take myself seriously as a writer. An older, wiser writer and mentor insisted that I buy myself a book to jot down my musings and develop the creative ideas evolving into plays and poems. It should be big enough for the task but small enough, ideally, to fit into a pocket or a shoulder or hand bag. If, heresy of heresies, you'd left your home without it on occasion, my mentor's advice was to jot down ideas that alighted like migrating birds in your imagination on anything. Yes, anything, and I have over the years – still do. Restaurant serviettes, bill receipts, cinema or theater tickets, which as soon as you're able should be pasted into your notebook. I would also recommend from personal experience postcards, small pictures, newspaper cuttings, etc., which have stirred or moved you. Paste them in and they will return your attention by flower-ing as ideas at many and unexpected times in the future. The award-winning Ameri-can novelist Truman Capote was thinking of a similar process when he referred to what he called "the toast principle." The principle is that if you don't put the bread in, there won't be any toast. Equally, a great thing about toast, apart from the taste; is that it sometimes flips up unexpectedly. Don't lose the ideas that come to you. They won't always return, or at least not with the spontaneity and flavor of delicious fresh toast.

To recap: what do you need to be a playwright? Answer: an active and resilient imagination and a sturdy notebook. Got both? Then we can move into the next section where I shall be addressing some issues as fundamental to the "starting-writer" as they are to the more experienced. These are:

- Genre and narrative.
- Structure.
- Characterization, dialogue, and conflict.

No, a toaster is not essential but it can help with those early morning writing sessions!

Genre and Narrative

The telling of the story is as ancient as the first human communities and the cultures that characterized their belief and value systems. Human life itself may be viewed as a narrative or story. Drama, which in its original Greek meaning correlates to "action," grew out of very early pre-Western religious rituals as attempts to explore what it means to be human. The major postwar British dramatist Edward Bond defines the way the human imagination is equivalent to what he terms "the dramatic site." It is on this site or location that human beings seek to explore, navigate, and resolve the predicament

of the human condition. It is no coincidence that the two major genres of dramatic literature, tragedy and comedy, arose in ancient Athens in a theater that owed its origins to the worship of the god Dionysus. This god embodied both male and female characteristics and qualities and was also one of the early pre-Christian prototypes of the divine "man-god." Dionysus was also directly associated with the grape (wine) and fertility. There were two major festivals of plays and there is significance in that the City (or Winter) Dionysia (festival) was solely associated with tragic dramas. By contrast the Rural (or Spring) Dionysia was solely associated with comic dramas. At the risk of reductive simplification, the genre of dramatic tragedy concerns itself with themes of mortality, death, and human suffering. Dramatic comedy explores themes associated with the spring and fertility: new life, sex and liberality and abundance. However, while tragedy and comedy are not identical twins, both genres are directly and closely related. It was once memorably observed that "a comedy is a tragedy in which no one dies at the end." Certainly if you explore a play such as *The Seagull* by the great nineteenth-century dramatist Anton Chekhov, which he insisted was a comedy, the narrative includes key dramatic events: the ultimately tragic seduction of a young, aspiring actress by a self-absorbed older novelist, a failed suicide by gunshot, and, offstage, in the final moments of the play, a successful second attempt by the same means and person.

Some dramatists tend and choose to follow a particular genre for and in their playwriting. It's important I suggest that you ask yourself that question. The genres can and do mix together and you might feel that you are attracted to both or a fusion. The important thing is to decide what it is you want to write and why. By this I don't mean that you feel you have to come up with simplistic "answers" or "explanations" for your plays. That would generally characterize plays which are too certain of what they mean. They would also likely be too closed in terms of allowing the audience its own engagement and interpretation. In the end, as a dramatist you will be working within a triadic process of dramatist-director-audience which is cyclical and organic rather than linear and artificially imposed. Some famous British playwrights such as George Bernard Shaw and John Osborne are associated as writers who write enormous, perhaps superfluous, amounts of commentary and explanation about their plays. My own strong view is that the play must as far as possible be left to speak for itself through the dynamic interaction of dramatist, director, and audience. Designers and composers will also of course play their own equally significant roles in terms of fully realized productions. The major twentieth-century German dramatist, director and theoretician Bertolt Brecht once spoke of the need for and ability of the dramatist to convey a forest through a single leaf.

There are many different forms of dramatic narrative and each is appropriate and useful according to the purposes and intentions of the playwright. Genre will play an important part in this.

Within the confines of this chapter I want to focus upon two forms of dramatic narrative which I hope and believe will be helpful. They are what I will call "linear narrative" and "disruptive narrative".

Linear narrative essentially tells its story in a sequential, linear, beginning-to-end format. The dramatist takes the audience on a narrative journey that begins with the establishing of location and (usually) central characters. The narrative then proceeds in a causal and sequential way, with each event, action, and character-decision growing out of its predecessor. This then impacts upon or facilitates the subsequent dramatic link in the narrative. This process will contain the seeds of dramatic action, whether external-sociological or internal-psychological, which will culminate in a crucial, defining "dramatic climax." Following this climactic dramatic moment in the play, there then conventionally follows what is known as the "denouement," in which the aftermath or final consequences of the climax are either resolved or at least identified. This narrative form may be found in plays as diverse in historical and generic terms as Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *The Bacchae* by Euripides, *Heartbreak House* by George Bernard Shaw, and *The Norman Conquests* (a trilogy) by Alan Ayckbourn. If you don't already know these plays I would recommend that you either read them or ideally see them in performance.

Does this narrative form describe either completely or partially your own current dramatic form as a playwright? I would invite you to ask yourself the following two questions in relation to your own work at this stage:

- What kind of narrative form am I currently employing?
- Is it essentially "linear" in form?
- Is it the most appropriate form for my intentions as a dramatist?

I also want to propose the following two, short practical exercises which you can try on your own.

Exercise 1

Take the following short opening scenario at the start of a play and write your own linear narrative version of the opening scene. The rules of the exercise are as follows. You must use at least three and preferably four characters. The dramatic action must remain in the one location at this stage. The dramatic action must move forward to a position out of which a subsequent scene can grow.

Scenario

The location is country house in late summer where it is dusk at the end of a beautiful summer's day. Two characters sit outside enjoying the last of the day's warmth. One of them is male and a teacher. He is aged about 35. He is single. The other character is female and in her early twenties. He has an unexpressed love or infatuation for her. She has an unexpressed love or infatuation for another, younger male character who is engaged to another younger female character.

Task

Write at least 50 lines of dialogue with a maximum of 75 (shared across all characters) in which the scene moves sequentially forward. A line of dialogue may range from one word to a full sentence. Your dialogue should not simply "tell the story" of "what has happened" or "what is happening." Neither of the two initial characters should, in your opening scene, convey to the audience or each other in any explicit way their feelings towards each other or the third, as yet unseen, character.

After you've completed the task, you should review the challenge if any that the exercise has presented for you. As always with all of your writing, keep a written record in your writer's notebook/journal of your thoughts.

Exercise 2

In this second exercise I want you to have a practical opportunity to explore some of the characteristics and issues around "disruptive narrative."

In one important sense of course all narratives are "disruptive," as I shall discuss in the later section on "conflict." However what is meant by the adjective in this context is a form of dramatic narrative or storytelling which is not conventionally sequential or causal (one thing following another by "cause and effect"), and is therefore nonlinear. It is for this reason that I use the term disruptive to describe it. The disruptive narrative will often be discovered in plays and used by playwrights wanting to especially challenge the assumptions of the audience and society. These assumptions will very often be ethical, moral, existential, and indeed political.

Scenario

A woman waits by the side of an empty road in an undefined location. There is no scenery, either urban or rural. She carries in her hand a wooden chair. Another woman comes on and also carries a wooden chair, similar if not identical in style and age to the other. They do not speak to or recognize each other. A third character, a man, enters also carrying a more or less identical wooden chair. There is no recognition or response.

Task

You must write a scene in which none of the characters talk in conventional language. They may use any or all of the following sounds: "yah," "mish," "lish," or "crah." No character can have more than a total of three lines of dialogue each in the scene. A line of dialogue may range from one "sound" to a "sound sentence." By the end of your scene, one of the characters must have taken and retained "ownership" of all three chairs. How and why? What are the consequences for the other two characters now without chairs?

After you have completed the exercise, review what the challenge was for you as a dramatist? What benefits or advantages, if any, might there be in writing in this narrative form?

Structure

Structure is one of the central and most important elements that a playwright needs to understand and apply. It can also seem to some if not many writers, especially at a starting or intermediate stage, to be the most challenging and difficult. Why?

If like me you are a writer who possesses a strong and vivid imagination where characters, themes and settings clamor for attention, structure might seem like an afterthought or unwanted consideration. However, structure is not something separate from imagination or in opposition to it. They are actually, at a deep level two sides of the same coin. They are mutually dependent in terms of making your emerging play work in the three-dimensionality and action which is drama and theater. Structure is also of course connected to the other skills in the writer's toolbox identified and discussed in this chapter. For example, considerations of genre and narrative are inescapably bound up with structure.

One helpful way to think about structure and to develop it in your own playwriting is to imagine a house that is being built. In addition to the bricks, mortar and cement for the walls, and the slates or tiles for the roof, there is the scaffolding that allows the house to be built. No scaffolding, no completed house, or at least not one that it would be safe to be in. No bricks and mortar, equally, and no amount of securely bolted scaffolding is in itself going to make a house.

Staying with this metaphor or paradigm I want to suggest some practical and hopefully clear ways in which you can develop and improve the dramatic structure in your own plays.

No house is going to stand or can be built without sure and unshakable foundations. Equally your play's structure must have a clear foundation. What is the core foundation of your proposed play? This doesn't necessarily mean that you have its purposes, themes, and characters completely identified and explicable to you before you pick up your pen or turn on your laptop. It does mean perhaps that you must be able to map out your core concerns in a way that will support the evolving structure of your play. As you prepare those ground-level foundations in your creative thinking, issues of narrative and genre and characterization, etc., must be placed into your playwright's cement mixer. Look at how some of the great dramatists establish the foundational structure in their work. Read the opening two scenes from *Hamlet*. Read the opening scene of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. Take a look at the opening of Edward Bond's *Lear* – a modern classic in which he radically revisits Shakespeare's original tragedy *King Lear*. Read the opening of Joe Orton's *Loot* or Mark Ravenhill's *The Cut*. In each case you will see the expert ways in which these diverse writers establish the ground floor of the play they're going to build. They each do so in a way

which contains within its opening some of the central and crucial themes and concerns and the dramatic site (or location) of their play. Crucially, you'll see that these writers don't *explain* everything to their audience. They build a clear door on a secure frame on the ground floor and *invite* their audience into the world of their play.

Once the ground-floor foundation is established then you can begin to build each floor as needed, whether you are employing a linear or disruptive narrative form or comic or tragic genre.

The scaffolding, as I stated earlier in this section, is not separate from the materials that build the walls, ceilings, and floors. What it does provide and is simultaneously assisted by is the *framework* and shape of your play. I want to suggest that in your writer's book or journal (remember that?) you actually sketch a rough drawing of the structure of your play. Will each level and stage in the structure support the "weight" of your intentions, concerns and themes as a dramatist, or will the steps to the next floor up suddenly stop? You may say that actually you *want* to exert that dizzying and provocative sense of vertigo and unease at that point in your play. Great! However, that key dramatic moment when the "floor gives way" under the character or scene, and therefore for the audience's usual expectations, must be planned into the structure of the play-building. It should never be, as I was guilty of in some of my earliest playwriting: "What a marvelous idea that would be to unsettle this or expose that." Your audience will not thank you for being left on a half-finished landing staring into an abyss. Being a careless builder will provoke discontent and bemusement. However, being a careful, consistent and innovative builder of dramatic structure will reassure your audience. It should persuade them that, despite their shock at the stair-rail suddenly disappearing; their sense of moral or existential unease or panic is shared with Hamlet. When faced by his uncle, who is also the murderer of his father, kneeling in prayer, might not the audience experience the moral dilemma facing Hamlet: an act of justice, revenge – or unadulterated murder?

The following exercise is intended for you to try out some of these ideas about dramatic structure.

Exercise

Scenario

A teenage girl aged 18 keeps a personal journal about her thoughts and feelings that no one else ever sees. She is about to go off to university at the end of the summer but is unsure as to whether she wants to, despite her outstanding academic gifts. As she writes, a rough-sleeper or homeless person, an older man of about 50, appears without her seeing him. They are both in a remote rural, country setting.

Task

Think about and plan a structure as to how this opening scene of a play is going to be built. What are the essentials that you think need to be in place for the characters

and their audience? How will you establish this dramatically? There's no need to write dialogue at this stage, although you can try some if you would like to and feel that it would help. More importantly, sketch out in diagrammatic and/or note form the structuring of this crucial opening scene.

Characterization, Dialogue, and Conflict

This section deals with three essential components of any good dramatist and any fine play. As with narrative, genre, and structure they are intimately interrelated. Characterization can and will be as varied and diverse as the types of genre out of which it emerges and which it serves. It should always communicate clearly, deftly and with subtlety. Individual characters never exist solely in their own terms. As John Donne, the poet, famously observed, "No man is an island unto himself." Characterization in your playwriting should therefore recognize and communicate this. When seeking to deal with actors and their egos, the great Russian theater director and practitioner Konstantin Stanislavski remarked "There are no small parts in a play, only small [minded] actors." Equally every character in your play should and will count. Unlike the 1960s and 1970s when the opportunities for playwrights were at a zenith, it is most unusual nowadays for large-cast plays to find a production. The economics of production simply don't allow it, except within the major subsidized theaters such as the National Theatre and Royal Shakespeare Company in the UK. You will therefore need to exercise practical self-interest as well as artistic choice in determining how many characters you feel you will need.

Double casting of smaller parts is of course possible but this must be done judiciously. However, as an example of how a seemingly "smaller" character can define a major moment in a play, one needs look no further than Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*. Another one of the great Russian writer's emotionally and psychologically complex and moving plays, it treads a challenging line between comedy (even farce at moments) and the tragedies of ordinary life. If you don't know this play, I strongly recommend that you read it and, as always, if possible see it in production. In the final scene of a play in which a once prosperous middle-class family has been forced by debt to sell its family home and accompanying cherry orchard; the old family retainer Fears is left on stage on his own. There is no dialogue but only the sound in the near distance of the first saws about to start chopping down the orchard in order that houses can be built in its place. Fears, a very old man who actually and metaphorically symbolizes the past, kneels slowly to the ground and goes to sleep. In the hands of a good director and actor, it is a dramatic moment of remarkable power, potency and poignancy. In a production at the Chichester Festival Theatre directed by Philip Franks in 2010, the fine actor Frank Findlay who played Fears took what seemed an unbearable and painful age to slowly kneel and then lie upon the floor. Curling into a childlike fetal position he lay, motionless, as the sound of the saw

slowly gathered momentum. Chekhov, Franks and Findlay knew exactly what they were doing in that last moment of the play.

This also affords another invaluable lesson for the dramatist. What *happens* on stage is as important as what is *said*. In Fears settling down for his (final?) rest, a simple dramatic moment conveys not only the passing of one man's life but the passing of a family and an era. Writing within less than 20 years of the tumultuous Russian Revolution of 1917, Chekhov evokes the excited anticipation of change while also acknowledging its personal pathos and potential social catastrophe.

Another final scene from a much later play, Edward Bond's controversial drama from 1965, *Saved*, in which a baby is stoned to death in its pram by a gang of aimless youths, contains only one line of dialogue. In that scene, despite this tragedy that has happened in their midst to the daughter Pam, the south London working-class family continue their usual routines. Len, a lodger anxious to believe that some kind of social and familial change must be possible; focuses on repairing a broken chair. The others effectively ignore him. At a midway point in the scene he says almost involuntarily, "Fetch me 'ammer." No one does, but he perseveres regardless.

At the risk of stating the obvious and offending your intelligence and common sense, it needs to be reiterated that Drama and Theater is practical and three-dimensional. It is action. Explore the ways in which in your own plays action or actions might be best employed to maximum dramatic effect.

Characterization, therefore, in any broadly realist drama conveys and explores a sense not only of who a character is but of where they've come from and where they are traveling. This is not the same as trying to give the audience endless and burdensome amounts of information about the character. In the hands of less good or very inexperienced writers this can sometimes lead to what an older, experienced dramatist-director friend once described to me as "first act amnesia." By this he meant playwriting in which the characters solely and exclusively relate information to the audience which the dramatist mistakenly believes is essential for the play to proceed and succeed. I offer, as a humorous warning, the following invented example:

Craven: So, Sykes, you must be the very same man that, having married Mary Robinson, my long-lost niece, and then eloped with Rosie Hoskins, the family maid, immigrated to Australia?

Sykes: No other, and you, Craven, must be the nationally famous industrialist who, having gambled uncharacteristically on the Stock Exchange, has lost his entire fortune and now faces prison or bankruptcy?

Characters must never simply be ciphers for information either about themselves or others. Similarly they should not be exclusively ciphers or mouthpieces for the dramatist's values, attitudes, or intentions in the play. Surprisingly, even in famous plays such as Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* referred to earlier in this chapter, the character of Jimmy Porter actually is little more on one level than a channel for Osborne's anger with a stifling, complacent 1950s Britain.

When you are preparing a new play or working on a new one, it can be really helpful to work out what actors and directors will sometimes call a "back story" for each character. What is their past prior to the opening of the play and what kind of character are they in emotional and psychological terms? Are there connections between the characters that might play an important role in determining major themes and conflicts in the play? At what crucial points in the play's narrative might these be revealed, however subtly? You can see how this approach would work particularly well with "linear narrative" plays.

Human conflict, either within an individual, a community or society, or between characters in relationship with each other is nonnegotiable. One might go so far as to say that a play without conflict is not and cannot be a play. Even in more experimental, nonnaturalistic plays such as *The Chairs* by the twentieth-century Romanian dramatist Ionesco, or *Waiting for Godot* by his better known contemporary Samuel Beckett, while the settings, characterization and events that happen might seem strange and even dreamlike, conflict nevertheless exists. When the two tramps Vladimir and Estragon wait by the side of a featureless road in an unnamed country in the hope (or fear?) that the mysterious character Godot will at last arrive, there is an implicit conflict both between them and the strange, alien world which Godot embodies.

In one of the finest social-realist plays of the immediate postwar period, Arnold Wesker's marvelous *Roots*, the central character of the young Beattie Bryant is in constant conflict with her mother and family. Desperate that what she sees as their lifeless, meaningless inertia should be understood by them as changeable, Beattie is overcome with frustration and anger. It is the very "engine-room" of the play. Even when her boyfriend, Ronnie – who is never seen – telegrams her to say that he won't be arriving and that their relationship is over, this painful and unexpected emotional conflict only deepens her resolve for personal change and transformation.

Exercise

Scenario

In this exercise concerned with the three interrelated elements of characterization, dialogue, and conflict, I want you to try the following.

I'm going to provide you with the opening lines of a scene and I want you to build upon and develop it into a longer scene. You'll be responsible for introducing and developing characters and narrative. You should aim to write a longish scene of ten A4 pages of double-spaced dialogue. The rules of the exercise are as follows:

- You shouldn't use fewer than three or more than five characters.
- In the first and last page of dialogue, no character should use (or be given) more than ten words of dialogue in a single utterance. In the other pages between, no character should ever have more than six sentences of dialogue.

- No character should tell the audience explicitly any information about themselves or other characters. Events or other dramatic material may be suggested or implied but not directly stated.
- There is no restriction on the race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation of your characters, or indeed their age.

I'm deliberately starting the dialogue for you by naming the two characters A and B. You, however, should name them and decide upon the character traits identified in the final bullet-point section above.

Task

(A character "A" runs on to the stage in a state of excitement and possibly anxiety)
A: Get away!
(Character "B" runs on to the stage from a different direction and throws himself at A, taking them both to the ground)
A: What?!
B: Keep quiet!
A: Who?
A: They'll find us!

Develop the scene from here, taking into account all of the following elements: narrative, genre, structure, characterization, dialogue, and conflict. Take your time. Review and redraft until you're absolutely sure that you are finally satisfied with what you've written. Then place it in a drawer or somewhere else where it can be safely out of sight and don't read it again for 48 hours. Only then should you take it out, reread it and make any changes that you feel would improve it. Do this carefully and thoughtfully!

Review your process? What have you learnt?

Finding an Audience: A Conclusion

Every dramatist needs and dreams of an audience. This can be one of the most frustrating, challenging, and discouraging aspects of being a dramatist. Nevertheless, experience shows that creative talent and perseverance in equal measure can achieve results.

Depending on the stage that you're at as a dramatist, you may already have had a good opportunity for your play to be read objectively and with constructive critical feedback. If you belong to a nonprofessional community theater group who might be interested in the kind of plays you're writing, that can be a very good place to start. The main advantage of such a group is that they will have no or few financial considerations in terms of investing in new playwriting. One of my very first and modest

achievements as a young dramatist came when I offered to write a play for the local Amnesty International group near to where I lived and to which I belonged. The resulting play was cast from other Amnesty and non-Amnesty members with only some or limited acting experience, but nevertheless played to good-sized audiences at community venues. It served to raise awareness both about Amnesty's work and about one particular "prisoner of conscience" they were working to release. It also happened to be seem by a very experienced professional actress and director who saw some potential and put me into really helpful contact with other experienced theater-makers who supported the development of my writing.

If you're not aware of or a member of any suitable groups in your area, you could of course create your own! An advertisement in your local library or community/arts center might well get you started. You can, of course, also try sending work to professional theater groups and companies. You should ascertain which is your local or nearest regional theater company. You should also find out if they're able to read new plays and respond. A polite letter or email briefly introducing yourself should be the first step. Do not send your play unsolicited. It will not be welcomed by a busy and overworked theater director. Nowadays, theaters that are interested in and willing to read new plays will often accept submission by email. You might also find that some building-based theaters run writers' groups, such as, in Britain, those at the Nuffield Theatre in Southampton, or Birmingham Rep. Check this out.

Theaters won't always have the staff or time to respond in detail to you about your play and it's fairly standard to expect to wait three months or so before receiving a response. Please be patient – and polite, if the response seems unduly negative or brief.

In Britain you'll find there are of course some very well-established national theaters, many of them London based, which are pleased to receive and respond to new writing. However, if you're reading this elsewhere than Britain, you'll find parallel examples. In Britain again, I would strongly recommend the English Stage Company, better known as the Royal Court (the name of its theater), which has a long and illustrious history of finding and developing new writers. Others that you might consider if you haven't already contacted them are the Soho Theatre and Paines Plough.

There are also smaller but very well-established and famous "fringe" or small studio theaters in London and all major cities which produce new writing. You'll need to do your own research on this but one or two that can be recommended are Michael Kingsbury's White Bear Theatre in Kennington, south London, and also the Bush Theatre and the Arcola (all London). You could also try the Tobacco Factory and the Alma Tavern Theatre in Bristol.

Before sending any plays, or even making initial contact, it is essential that you do some research first. How large is the venue, and what kinds of plays do they seem/ tend to produce? Are they likely to be interested in your writing? All of these various companies have their own helpful and informative websites and it's worth your while to spend some time surfing for possibilities.

There are also a number of playwriting competitions which are worth finding out about. Just two well-known examples of such competitions are the Bruntwood Playwriting Competition organized in conjunction with the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester, and the Verity Bargate Award run by the Soho Theatre, London. However, there are many more and again some surfing of the internet should prove helpful.

I would also strongly recommend that you consider joining the Writers' Guild of Great Britain, or if you're reading this from another geographical and cultural location, the equivalent organization in your own country. The WGGB offers several categories of membership. You'll receive a regular magazine and, even more helpfully, a weekly e-bulletin which will keep you up to date with key developments in the world of professional theater, television, etc., and will also advertise competitions and useful courses and contacts. Do give this some serious consideration – and no, I'm not on a commission from the WGGB but I have belonged for nearly 20 years and have benefited a lot from it during that time.

An increasing number of very good creative writing courses are becoming available at many different levels. Check out what might be available in your area. More and more universities offer undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Creative Writing. Check them out. The Arvon Foundation in the UK offers an exciting range of residential writing courses, including ones specifically dealing with playwriting. The tutors are all experienced and successful professional writers and you also get the benefits of mixing with other writers, usually for a week-long period. In Wales, Ty Newydd offers a very interesting range of residential creative writing courses. There are also increasing numbers of playwriting festivals, such as HighTide, which are worth finding out more about. There are other broadly similar organizations in other countries.

Finally, what happens if, after submitting your play to a theater company or group, there is a positive response? This almost certainly won't mean an immediate offer of production, I'm afraid, unless you are one of a *very* fortunate few. However, if you're invited to come in and meet with someone at the company to talk about your writing, or even to discuss the possibility of a rehearsed reading of your plays, this is a serious response on their part and one which you should value, appreciate and take advantage of. Never, ever respond to any individual or group/company that requires you to pay any money "in advance" for the development or promised production of your work.

Also all reputable and established theater companies and groups will extend an invitation to you to attend some and possibly all of any rehearsals of your work leading to rehearsed readings or partial or full performances.

Theater in the end is a collaborative and communal activity and experience. It has its own unique value and meaning and when things work well in theater-making, it can be one of the most gratifying of creative endeavors. However, because it is collective and collaborative it also requires a considerable amount of "give and take" and a willingness to listen as well as to express your own creative viewpoint. Any good director will always want to share the process of developing and directing a writer's

work, although the writer must be prepared to let their play – their "precious child" – also live and breathe independently of their own view of their work.

I'm going to conclude by wishing you the very best of creative success and fulfillment with your playwriting. Don't give up! I'm also offering the following list of plays which I recommend that you read and where possible see. There really is nothing more helpful than learning from the very best of the writers from the last 2,000 years or so.

One final quote from one of America's very best twentieth-century dramatists, Edward Albee, whose most famous play was the powerful drama of marital breakdown, savage interpersonal betrayal, and the illusion of "the American Dream." This play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, was made into a wonderful iconic film starring Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. When asked what a dramatist's role was, he replied, "To be true to themselves, to their own vision – and never to try and second-guess their audience."

My advice to you? "Write on!"

Recommended Plays

This list is of course far from comprehensive and not compulsory reading. It does, however, reflect some of the most distinctive and some truly great plays by a range of writers over 2,000 years of human cultural activity and achievement. I have taught many of these works, if not all of them, and directed many over a lifelong period spent in education and theater. You will find your own favorites among them, and of course discover your own in addition to them!

The Bacchae by Euripides
Lysistrata by Aristophanes
Hamlet by Shakespeare
King Lear by Shakespeare
A Midsummer Night's Dream by Shakespeare
The Way of the World by Congreve
The Critics by Sheridan
A Doll's House by Ibsen
Hedda Gabler by Ibsen
The Seagull by Chekhov
The Cherry Orchard by Chekhov
Miss Julie by Strindberg
Six Characters in Search of an Author by Pirandello
Long Day's Journey into Night by O'Neill
Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller
The Crucible by Arthur Miller
Look Back in Anger by John Osborne

Roots by Arnold Wesker
A Kind of Honey by Shelagh Delaney
Sergeant Musgrave's Dance by John Arden
Saved by Edward Bond
Lear by Edward Bond
Bloody Poetry by Howard Brenton
The Real Inspector Hound by Tom Stoppard
Cloud Nine by Caryl Churchill
Top Girls by Caryl Churchill
Ask for the Moon by Shirley Gee
Masterpieces by Sarah Daniels
Inside Out by Tanika Gupta
Mule by Winsome Pinnock
The Cut by Mark Ravenhill
Blasted by Sarah Kane
The American Pilot by David Grieg.

6

Writing for Sound/Radio

Steve May

Some writers will tell you that they "just write" and pay no attention to any outside forces shaping their work. In fact, running a large Creative Writing department, I have found it extremely difficult to get students – and tutors – to engage with the issue of the external forces (conscious and especially unconscious) that shape our work. There's a tendency to cultivate the idea of the university course as a "sacred" or "protected" space where originality can flourish (see May, "Investigating the Means of Production"). It's my contention that when we "just write" we are being bullied by a huge messy mix of pressures and preconceptions: personal – among other things, what we have heard and forgotten; what we have liked; what we have disliked; where we were born; and what our mother taught us (or how we were indoctrinated). And alongside, and intermeshed with these personal preconceptions, there are the pressures of industry and audience. As Raymond Chandler wrote:

> No writer in any age got a blank check . . . He has always had to accept some conditions imposed from without, respect certain taboos, try to please certain people. It might have been the Church, or a rich patron, or a generally accepted standard of elegance, or the commercial wisdom of a publisher or editor, or perhaps even a set of political theories. If he did not accept them, he revolted against them. In either case they conditioned his writing. (Quoted in Estleman 10)

John Frow asserts:

> classification [of literature] is an industrial matter. It is enacted in publishers' catalogues and booksellers' classifications, in the allocation of time-slots for television shows and

in television guides, in the guidelines and deliberations of arts organisations, and in the discourses of marketing and publicity, together with the whole apparatus of reviewing and listing and recommending . . . (Frow 12)

Even if we aren't consciously aware of the influence of the creative industries through the actions and decisions of publishers and broadcasters, we are surely affected by those decisions, and ignoring "industry conditions" doesn't make them go away. Ignoring them only renders us less capable of reflecting on and analyzing the choices we make as writers. Therefore, in this chapter, rather than deal with the craft of writing for sound/radio in the abstract, I'm going to ask some fundamental questions about the available markets, models, and audiences, in order to evoke the kinds of pressures these factors exert on writers, and the possibilities they provide.

What Do We Mean by Radio?

Up until very recently, radio output was truly time-based. Programs were scheduled on a one-off basis. Either you heard it, or you didn't. True, some programs might be repeated, and you could record a broadcast live off air, but this was troublesome and demanded someone present at the real time of the broadcast to click the record button (radio output recorders with timers were virtually nonexistent). This strict time base had implications for content, for the kinds of things a broadcast could contain and still hope to achieve an appropriate response from a listener.

Further, radio meant a broadcaster, either licensed or unlicensed, a gatekeeper to that which was broadcast. It was the broadcaster, not the writer or even the director/producer, who had the final say over what was suitable, in terms of comprehensibility, and in terms of taste and decency.

In recent years several developments have changed all this: first, the advent of digital radios with recording features; second, the introduction of "listen again" facilities in BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) Radio; third, the development of play on demand, whereby radio pieces can be hung up on a website (such as iTunes) and downloaded at the pleasure of the listener. More generally, the means of production have become increasingly available – and affordable: "The arrival of the internet, and internet radio, has freed creative programme makers from the need for transmission equipment, broadcast schedules and sponsorship, and ushered in an era in which almost every imaginable approach to programme making is now possible."[1]

So, while it has always been possible to create sound-based art as an individual practitioner without the backing of a large broadcasting organization such as the BBC, only recently has it become possible (at least in theory) to take that individually produced work out to a wide audience. We'll look at the difficulties inherent in this do-it-yourself approach later. First let's look closer at audience in general.

For Whom Are We Writing?

The question of whom we are writing for is more complicated than it first appears. Some writers will again try to simplify by saying, "I write for myself or people like me, and hope they will appreciate what I write." The questions remain, what kind of person are you, what are your preconceptions, what are your cultural assumptions? To give a concrete example: How do you decide how much information to give, or what kind of information? How do you know your audience will understand your cultural references?

At the level of simple information, in Orson Welles' classic *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast, the listener is told five times in less than a minute that Professor Pearson is based at Princeton, and that's where we are. Why? Isn't it enough to know that he's a boffin with some pertinent info to impart? Perhaps not, when the broadcaster wants us to believe that this is verité, not drama. This tendency to "overinform" in classic radio is parodied in Timothy West's short script "This Gun That I Have in My Right Hand Is Loaded," where characters relentlessly tell us who they are, how old they are, and what they are doing.

However, cultural specificity and assumption extends far beyond points of information. It extends to deep matters of morality, of right and wrong, and the acceptability or otherwise of behavior. Some years ago a graduate student (rather a posh graduate student, I should add) wrote a piece called *Posh Dessert* (I've changed the name for legal reasons). The story (so far as it went) was simple. Girl meets boy, boy and girl arrange to eat at her flat, girl cooks main, boy is to bring dessert. Now we encounter some British cultural specificity. The trouble is, boy doesn't cook it, or even buy it from Harrods (which for those who don't know is a posh London store), he buys it from Sainsbury's (which is not the lowest of the low, but rather at the top end of middling). Girl is appalled and kicks him into touch. End of story. The workshop group queried this ending. It was felt that the cultural conflict involving the dessert was a good starting point for exploration of the relationship of girl and boy, but not a satisfying end point. However, the author was adamant: she couldn't understand how the group could be so morally ambiguous or slack. From her viewpoint, anyone who bought desserts from Sainsbury's was simply evil, and not worth the bother of a relationship, let alone a part in her literary canon.

That author would tell you that she had "just written" her story without thinking about its intended audience. In doing so, she had made numerous local assumptions – for example, that her reader would be aware of the precise hierarchy of UK stores. And she'd made one overarching and highly exclusive assumption – that everyone (or at least, everyone in her audience) despises mid-range desserts and their purchasers. Her refusal to acknowledge a potential relativity in attitudes to stores and desserts in the end made her main character (and, let's be frank, though we know it's all about the writing and not the writer – her) seem both narrow-minded and faintly ludicrous.

So, I would contend that it behoves those of us writing for a medium, even if we're "just writing," to examine our equivalents of desserts and stores. What things are we blindly assuming our audience will know, and more important, what propositions are we assuming they will find morally acceptable?

In the specific case of writing for BBC Radio, the demographic composition of the audience has been well researched. It varies according to the time of day of the broadcast, but at 2.15 on a weekday (the time of the Afternoon Play), for instance, it has an average age of 53 and is predominantly female, with a sizable male minority usually employed in driving or traveling occupations:

> Weekday Afternoon: 1.00 pm to 3.00 pm – Catching up with the news at one o'clock is important to our listeners. Apart from its obvious function the news takes listeners out of their own world into a wider context; it is energising after a busy morning and "peps you up." However, the early afternoon is a time when those who like to treat or reward themselves once or twice a week can do so. If employed in some sort of household activity, it is the sort of work that can also "earn the right to listen." It might include non-essential household activity such as ironing or repairs. Listeners say they can "mentally," if not actually, sit down to listen. (BBC, *Commissioning Guidelines*, 1998)

What implications does this have for the writer? We don't need to speculate, the guidelines go on to spell those implications out:

> The dynamics of the storytelling should be clear and well signposted. Overuse of sound effects and playing with form will be less suitable for this daytime audience which is listening while engaged in light housework or driving . . . The slot will aim to increase the listening in cars by ensuring that the programmes are not too complex in their use of sound or storytelling.

So, as writers, we are not only being used to create artistic content, we are being asked to play a direct part in recruiting or increasing a specific listenership.

True, these guidelines come from more than a decade ago, at the height of the changes at the BBC inspired by John Birt and carried out at Radio 4 by James Boyle, but the spirit is still alive. Current commissioning editor Jeremy Howe observes:

> [Radio 4] isn't a fringe theatre where you can put on anything you like. This is a broadcast network . . . where we are playing to an audience, in the Friday play, which is our smallest slot, of a mere 350,000 people, to the Woman's Hour drama, where you're playing to way in excess of a million people. You need to tailor your writing to that shape, to that audience, not least because it is very slot-bound. (Jeremy Howe, interview in Dann 66)

Audiences for the kind of sound creations made by the "creative programme makers" evoked by the British Library Archive above may be more like those for fringe

theater – certainly in terms of size. The problem still remains for the practitioner, how to find an audience that wants to listen to his or her kind of creations (see below).

Do We Hope to Earn Meaningful Income from Writing for Sound?

I attended a presentation about audio features at a big US writing conference a couple of years ago. One of the presenters was excited because an online journal was actually paying for radio features. How much? "Oh, about $30." Nice, but not (I think) economically viable for making a living.

The fact remains that the only broadcaster in the UK or indeed the world who pays enough (both in amount and in volume) to sustain life for a writer is BBC Radio, and more specifically BBC Radio 4. The minimum rate for established writers was (at time of writing) £86.21 per minute for two transmissions. For a standard 45-minute Afternoon Play, that would pay you £3,879.45. In April 2010 median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees in the UK were £499, or £25,900 a year.[2] So, write (and sell) six plays a year and you're earning the median wage. If you're a beginner, at £51.72 per minute, you'll have to write (and sell) 11 radio plays. And if you're a beginner writing for the BBC's new digital speech network Radio 4 Extra (previously known as Radio 7), you'll have to write (and sell) 20 or more to achieve that median level of earnings.

The contrast with remuneration for BBC TV writers is instructive: for a 45-minute commission a TV writer would get £20,000. However, there are negatives for television writing: first, in 2009 BBC TV commissioned only 28 single plays – BBC Radio commissioned over 200; second, TV commissions five scripts for every one that is actually made; and third, the radio writer's fee constitutes over 20 percent of the program budget, against 5 percent for the TV writer. Why is this last fact important? It means that you as the writer for radio are more important in the process than the TV writer, who can much more easily be discarded, written off, or ignored.

But, I hear you asking, what has this to do with creativity, and the content of your writing? A lot, I would answer. Those writers who do earn the majority of their income from writing for radio will have to write a lot. A prolific radio writer such as Mike Walker[3] will have to be very organized, both creatively and as a business person. He will have to keep pitching new ideas while fulfilling commissions. He will also have to research possible adaptations, and keep a nose open for the scents of the season as far as commissioners go. A writer working in this way will, I contend, produce work very different than if they spent three years agonizing over a single cherished idea. Notice, I stress work that is different, not necessarily better or worse.

Thirty years ago, the BBC's handbook for writers, *Writing for the BBC*, emphasized the nonprofessional nature of the form:

> Radio presents a unique means of self expression for "kitchen-table writers" who have neither the qualifications nor perhaps the ambition to become professional authors but

who feel called upon to write about their opinions or experiences once or twice in a year, or a lifetime. They include many housebound mothers of families and retired people of both sexes, to whom radio in particular has long been a familiar companion. The BBC has helped to give these amateur writers, who might have found no other outlet for their talents, the chance to establish contact with an audience, and to be paid for doing so. (Longmate 31)

One can't help but compare this to the advice given to would-be contributors to community radio stations in Australia by Graham Andrews: "Radio can provide an excellent and constructive way to express how and what you feel, how you feel about the government or your workplace conditions."

A form, then, for amateurs and protesters, people with a bit of an axe to grind and not necessarily much talent at grinding. Maybe, but Gordon House, former Head of BBC Radio Drama, offers another, more positive interpretation:

Writers are writing from experience, and if you're writing radio plays every day of your life, then there's not much else happening to you. You want to get out there and live a bit! Some of our best writers are really fine professional writers who happen to do other things as well and aren't relying on radio to give them a living. (in Dann 92)

And looked at another way, a survey by the UK Society of Authors found that "three quarters of their members earn less than half the average national wage"; and further, according to a more recent survey "only 20% of UK writers earn all their income from writing" and "the bottom 50% earn about 8% of total income."[4] So, radio writers are not alone in having to look for other forms of income – and if a radio writer does happen to sell two plays in a year at the established writer rate, then she or he is approaching the norm for UK writing income.

By What Process Does a Writer Get Work Made for BBC Radio?

Radio drama at the BBC has become increasingly command led, first in terms of subject matter, then of tone, treatment, and scope. There has been a move over the last 20 years from writers writing plays and the BBC broadcasting them (or not), to BBC executives at various levels deciding what kind of plays they want to broadcast, and finding writers to write them (May, "Scriptwriting for Radio").

As Joyce Bryant, I have (between 2007 and 2012) written eight plays with a university setting for BBC Radio 4, under the umbrella title *Higher*. It wasn't my idea. The suggestion came from the commissioner for Radio 4 drama. However, don't get the idea that an actual commission came with the suggestion. No. The commissioner is I suppose somewhat in the position of a bountiful duchess who flings some largesse out of her carriage window and then waits to be amazed at a future ball by the ingenious use made of said largesse by the industrious poor.

So, the process goes thus: commissioner suggests a set of plays dealing with current issues in HE, I come up with some one-page outlines, and then discuss them with a series of people. These people don't include the commissioner. They are an executive producer, an editor, and later a producer/director. The outlines get changed, reemphasized, characters appear and disappear, main and subsidiary stories come and go, and the tone and sound of the plays is reimagined. When we're all as happy as we can be, the resulting ideas get fed back to the commissioner. And get changed subject to his comments, and submitted again.

This progressive pitching process, particularly in the world of script, has hardly been studied, and its part in the creative process is little understood. There are How To books which touch on various aspects of pitching,[5] but the whole complex negotiation is difficult to capture. However, this doesn't make an attempt at description undesirable, because the effects on the finished product are profound. At each stage, at each meeting, at each moment, both the writer and those representing the commissioner are dancing a dance of compromise, presumed understanding, and mutual cultural assumption. You think you know what you mean, and they think they know what you mean, and they think they know what they want, and you're trying to find out what they want (always understanding that the commissioner might have different wants); and all these "steps" in the waltz are liable to sudden change and alternative interpretation (people change jobs, they get sick, priorities at higher level change). And for the process to work, change is essential: there'd be little point meeting if the writer's vision is set and the commissioner's want is precise – either they'd match or not.

At each stage of the dance, there is the possibility of it all going wrong, and ending in a tangle of trodden feet. The extremes are the polar opposite possibilities, both familiar from films about Hollywood: the writer refuses to compromise, and walks off the set; or the commissioners lose patience with the inflexible writer, fire him or her, and bring in six new writers to progress the job.

But, while each progressive discussion has at least the potential for disaster, there are also positive possibilities. For example, take the common economic pressure on cast size. You have written a script requiring six actors, and the broadcaster can only afford five. You could dig your heels in and try to insist that having six actors is the only way to do justice to your vision. You could, in the face of continued opposition, fold up your tent and betake yourself back to the wilderness with the play unmade. But you could (should at least try) to examine each of your characters, and ask some questions. Why do you need six characters? For example, Sammy, what does she do in the play? What's her function? What does she give that one of the other characters doesn't give? And it may be that as a writer a lightbulb goes on in your head and you see that economic restriction has in fact brought about artistic improvement, and the whole script will be much much clearer and better without Sammy.

In the case of *Higher* I promised each "dancer" something slightly different, and in each meeting, in each discussion, I adapted and redacted, I revisioned, I rescoped. It's fair to say that as the process went on, I got a clearer and clearer idea of what the

series would sound like, the sound world it would inhabit, and its tone and rhythm. Was this my vision? Not exclusively. But always the world was one that I subscribed to, was interested in, and wanted to write about. Here's a snapshot of how the overall "feel" of the series changed through the development process:

> *The style will be pseudo documentary, maybe even including some actual documentary elements (sound bites from politicians, experts, students, lecturers, etc.) . . . And informing everything is a mad and incessant haste. It's all hectic. There's thousands of students with timetable clashes, rooms double booked, overbooked, rooms bulging, heaving: sweating technicians desperately trying to pump some life into outmoded overhead projectors, car park rage, lavatories flooding, mentally unbalanced students running amok.* (Version X, April 2007)

By version Y we have a central character, and rather than reference to a series of events, we have a more generic concept of sound world:

> *NOTE: I envisage a stressed, high paced production style, which adds to the panic and oppression of KAREN and everyone else. It's as though they're in a crazy washing machine controlled by the OUTLOOK EXPRESS CALENDAR, to the music of which they hurtle their danse macabre. The email arrival warnings scatter like mortar shells.* (Version Y, September 2007)

The pseudo-documentary slant has gone: perhaps because we put it in as a sop to the commissioner (who had established a center for drama/documentary at the BBC's Bristol network center), ignorant of the fact that he had already decided to produce the plays (if commissioned) through the nondrama/doc center in Manchester. Or perhaps someone (or me) didn't like it – or perhaps in the end we realized that the series is (like many of my plays) a good old farce, utilizing heightened reality, and not documentary at all.

In one sense one could conclude that this whole process was a farce and pointless. Steve May (even if he calls himself Joyce Bryant) can only write a certain kind of script. Once he has successfully played the consultation and development game, he goes ahead and writes the script he would have written anyway – why on earth would anyone think he could do anything other?

The writing process is more complex than this. Our "idea" for the script may seem clear from an early stage, but once we observe it, have it observed by others, have it squeezed and pressed by considerations of slot length, available cast, and the command economy visions of the broadcaster, the thing we write cannot be the thing we would have written without those pressures.

But by the same token, the thing we would have written outside of the process might well not have got written. There's no doubt that for me the constraints of writing somewhat to a brief and in collaboration with a director actually make the creative process easier. And certainly if you've been paid, there is an incentive to get the thing done which is absent when writing on spec.

When a pilot script finally got made, another few changes: we had to shift some characters' names a little as they were too close to real people who might sue; and the character I had least interest or faith in, and who for me only served to carry out plot functions (lecturer David Poll), turned out (when inhabited by actor Mark Heap) to be the most interesting, complex, and funny. And finally, when I heard the play for the first time, I discovered the director (with whom I had worked well) had stuck in some music without asking me.

What Other Avenues Are There in the Writing and Production of Creative Work in Sound?

In the US, Joe Frank has for along time been experimenting with sound forms, and particularly monologues (or perhaps better termed "one person plays"). These often interweave "reality" (in the shape of gullible callers) with dramatized personae, creating (for me) an uncomfortable reaction – probably what the creator intends.

Some of the most interesting work in sound-based art is taking place in the area of documentary or nonfiction narrative. Internationally one can point to the work of the WNYC Radiolab based in New York, or the Third Coast Festival based in Chicago (see list of online audio sites below). Although the focus is on nonfiction, in both of these centers the key feature is narrative told with imaginative use of sound. Both of these provide arenas that welcome input from the public by way of open calls or competitions. My colleague Paul Evans has written several award-winning pieces for the BBC Afternoon Play slot, produced not by the drama, but the natural history department, where location sound recordings are an integral part of the script, and overall sound design is as important as narrative.[6] There are also "pioneering" stations such as Touch Radio, which you can access via the British Library Archive, which specializes in pure sound without narrative.

Of a more conventional experimental nature are Resonance104.4FM ("a radio station that makes public those artworks that have no place in traditional broadcasting"), VirtuallyAudio ("a premiere site for unique audio entertainment including original music, audio comic books and radio theatre"), Radio Wildfire ("spreading the spoken word online . . . an eclectic mix of original spoken word, literature, discussion, and writing from new and up-and-coming authors and scriptwriters"), Crystal Clear Creators ("a not-for-profit arts organisation and company limited by guarantee, which is devoted to developing, producing, publishing and promoting new writing"), Wireless Theatre Company ("modern radio drama for a modern world"), and Audiotheque ("free thinking, open source, audio drama"). There are also the numerous community radio stations that have emerged in recent years, operating under Restricted Service Licence regulations, which are usually eager to broadcast creative material, so long as it is at no cost.

Or you could set up your own web-based drama, as did Lance Dann with his *Flickerman* project. *The Flickerman* utilizes an array of web-based resources (blogs,

photos, social networking sites) to create, sustain, and augment the linear narrative. Dann terms this new form "interactive online multi-platform story telling." The project earned him much publicity, international exposure, but little financial reward, and depended on the willing (unpaid) cooperation of a network of friends and colleagues. As with so much web-based endeavor, the uncracked problem remains "monetization."

Conclusion

The concentration on slot and audience, and the command-led commissioning processes of the BBC can lead to accusations of sameness and unoriginality of style:

> When a reputation for over-theatrical acting was placed alongside all the cosy children's favourites, the stock-in-trade thrillers and the pleasant amusements of Wodehouse, it was easy to characterise Radio Four drama as overwhelmingly derivative and unadventurous. Critics concluded that too many plays had woven about them an aura of cloying, suburban, predictability. (Hendy 204)

The implication for us as writers is that however original we think we are, however different, however fresh, when our play emerges from the long and complex development and recording process, it will sound just like every other play broadcast by the BBC. Further, radio may not be the place for a writer to make an impact: for Hendy, writing for radio is "akin to shouting into a deep hole. Writers live by being noticed; but radio leaves hardly any trace" (Hendy 195).

There is some small move toward making radio drama available on a more permanent basis. BBC Audiobooks (where the main staples are readings of Agatha Christie and other popular classics, and period adaptations) have more recently made some less mainstream dramas available.[7] So, for under £2 you can buy a play from Sebastian Baczkiewicz's aurally complex and somewhat strange *Pilgrim* series, first broadcast in 2010, or Ali Taylor's edgy satire *Cinders*. And if you are really keen to track down radio plays of the past, you can consult the British Library collection,[8] where (apart from a dozen of my plays) you could also access the works of David Pownall, Howard Barker, Giles Cooper, and the writers who have won the radio writing award named after him.

As for writing for the web, the problems remain: how do you find an audience, how do you educate listeners to appreciate the full possibilities of sound – and how do you make money from your art?[9]

Notes

Throughout this chapter I'm indebted to the work of three of my past and current Ph.D. students: Dr Lance Dann and his work on BBC radio commissioning; Richard Hudson and his work on genre; and

Susan McMillan and her work on pitching and treatments in the creative process. I am also indebted to Jonathan Taylor of De Montfort University for his generosity in reading a draft of this chapter, and for his numerous helpful suggestions.

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WritersRoom. At http://www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/writing/tips_radiodrama.shtml (accessed Dec. 2012).

ONLINE AUDIO SITES

Audiotheque, at www.audiotheque.co.uk

Crystal Clear Creators, at http://www.crystalclearcreators.org.uk/

The Flickerman, at http://www.theflickerman.com/

Joe Frank, at http://www.joefrank.com

Radiolab WNYC, at http://www.radiolab.org/

Radio Tower, at http://www.radiotower.com

RadioWildFire, at http://radiowildfire.com

Resonance104.4fm, at http://resonancefm.com/

Third Coast International Audio Festival, at http://thirdcoastfestival.org/

VirtuallyAudio, at http://www.virtuallyaudio.com/

Wireless Theatre Company, at http://www.wirelesstheatrecompany.co.uk/

7
Writing the Screenplay

Craig Batty

It is astonishing how many books on creative writing forget screenwriting, or mention it only briefly, often alongside radio and theater writing. We do not like to take it personally, of course, but there are so many reasons why screenwriting is important! Not only do films, television dramas, and online fictions take up a huge part of people's lives; not only do many thousands of students dream of writing for the screen, big or small, each year when choosing their degree program; not only does screenwriting have its own language and working practices, all of which fascinate those who know little about the industry; and not only do writers of other forms (novel, radio, theater) often write in those forms because they want their work to become a success and be adapted for the screen. What screenwriting can really do is teach all writers about the fundamentals of storytelling: character, structure, world, theme, dialogue, visuality, etc. It can be astounding, when working with novelists and poets, to see how much is transferable and how much they enjoy testing out ideas and experimenting with a form that is not their natural choice, and then use that acquired knowledge to improve their "normal" work. At the heart of this is wanting to find ways of telling a good story well; and so, whatever form you write in, I am confident there is something in this chapter that will speak to you; something that will help you understand the work that you are creating.

There are so many screenwriting books on the market that one wonders where to begin. Many of them give an overview of the craft of screenwriting, from creating characters to designing structures to writing scenes. These include *The Definitive Guide to Screenwriting* (Field), *Scriptwriting for the Screen* (Moritz), *Making a Good Script Great*

(Seger) and *Screenplays: How to Write and Sell Them* (Batty). Other books focus on specific areas of the craft and business of screenwriting, such as *Developing Characters for Script Writing* (Davis), *The Third Act: A Structural Approach to Writing Great Endings* (Yanno), *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* (Vogler), *Writing Dialogue for Scripts* (Davis), *Genre Screenwriting*: *How to Write Popular Screenplays That Sell* (Duncan), *Writing Subtext: What Lies Beneath* (Seger) and *The Script-Selling Game: A Hollywood Insider's Look at Getting Your Script Sold and Produced* (Yoneda). More recently, a different kind of screenwriting book has emerged, one that is more academic in tone and nature, willing the reader/writer to think beyond paradigms and prescriptions and explore different avenues of practice and practice-related theory. These include *Screenwriting: History, Theory and Practice* (Maras), *The Woman in the Story: Writing Memorable Female Characters* (Jacey), *Creative Screenwriting: Understanding Emotional Structure* (Kallas), and *Movies That Move Us: Screenwriting and the Power of the Protagonist's Journey* (Batty).

Depending where on the screenwriting spectrum you are – beginner, advanced, student, nonstudent, tutor – it is highly recommend that you look at a range of these books. Some of them will tell you what to do, and some of them will tell you how to do it; note the difference here! Some of them will tell you why you do it, and some of them will question you to think about why you want to do it. By looking at a range of books, you will get a sense of what does and does not work for you. You might be really interested in understanding why we tell stories in the way we do; or you might not care about that and just want to make money. Both approaches are fine, actually, and you will soon find different authors who speak your language. If you are a student, aim to think "beyond the mold" and read more academic, rigorous books. Not only will this deepen your analytical and reflective skills, it will give you a more informed approach to practice and help you develop your own ideas about how to do things, not just take for granted ideas presented by others.

So what will this chapter explore? Clearly, there is not enough space to cover the spectrum of screenwriting craft and business; and, as highlighted above, there are many books that already do this. There is not the space either to engage in academic debates, and considering that this chapter is in the "doing" section of the book, that would not be wholly appropriate. What is most useful is a chapter that covers some of the most important areas of the craft and business of screenwriting, and not only that, different and less written-about areas; or areas that are written about, but not in the way presented here. The hope is that this will be both insightful and inspiring.

The Nature of Screenwriting

A common perception is that a screenplay is merely a working document: an artifact that will be turned into something else entirely, such as a film, TV drama, or webisode. In other words, it transposes from a static, text-based "thing" to a live piece of moving

image. Although this is technically true, it is philosophically untrue. Whether on paper or on a computer screen, a screenplay is not static at all. Aside from the fact that it is bound go through numerous rewrites, possibly even by other screenwriters, a screenplay is a document full of life. We do not just read a screenplay because we want to understand how the film will be made: we read a screenplay because it tells a good story in itself, one that has the power to entertain and move us. Action on the page runs through our mind as we read. The dialogue becomes heard in our head. The pace of the story emerges at this initial stage through the way the screenplay has been structured: the overarching three-act structure of the story, the scene-by-scene structure of the acts, and even the beat-by-beat structure of the individual scenes. A screenplay is written in the active voice – she flirts, he scarpers, they clash – which means it "speaks to us" as we read. We do not think about what happened and contemplate why: we "see" what is happening, right here, right now, and understand why. Our imagination works as much as it would when reading a novel, the exception being that in a screenplay it is always in the present tense.

When writing a screenplay, then, we should think about how we might use evocative language to capture the attention and imagination of the reader (agent, producer, director, actor, etc.); we should think about how we might use the layout of the page to strengthen the feel of a scene; and we should think about how we might connect scenes to punctuate meaning and build pace. For example, the following screen direction is technically fine, but rather uninspiring:

> Mary is sitting in her living room, looking at the clock intermittently, waiting for Simon to return home.

Compare it with this version:

> Mary sits.
> And sits.
> The clock ticks.
> She looks up, intermittently, waiting.

Although both directions give exactly the same information, the first is bland and detached from the character of Mary. The second is more evocative of the pain Mary is enduring as she waits for Simon. Writing the screen direction in beats that mirror the character's inner turmoil gives a stronger sense of the how the scene would be played out when produced; and it is much more interesting to read. It has a life beyond the page.

As another example, using specific verbs can enhance the power of a scene and the life of a screenplay on the page. Verbs give a more accurate sense of how a character does something, and thus create a stronger sense of the visuality of a scene. *Marco walks* gives us a subject and an action, which makes sense and allows us to understand the unfolding action. However, if we change the verb to *Marco strides* or *Marco saunters* or *Marco minces*, we get a much stronger sense of his character and perhaps even his

motivation. Visually, too, we can see Marco much better than if he just walks. Similarly, *Emma laughs* does not really tell us anything about her character and motivation when compared to *Emma cackles*, *Emma giggles*, or *Emma sneers*.

We should, therefore, be confident that a screenplay has a life of its own. Its purpose may be to outline how the actual production will work, and to sell that idea to the right reader, but it should still be written to speak to its reader about itself. It should be evocative and create a feeling for the story being told.

A film that explores the nature of screenwriting well is *Adaptation* (2002), a film about a screenwriter (Charlie Kaufman) and his attempts to adapt Susan Orlean's book for the screen. It works on so many levels, from Charlie's attempts to adapt a book that we see Susan writing (use of flashback structure), to his twin brother Donald's attempts to also become a screenwriter, to a cameo character of screenwriting guru Robert McKee, that it gives a really useful insight into what it is like to be a screenwriter, warts and all. The irony of the film is that Charlie is trying his hardest to move away from the well-worn structure-heavy models of screenwriting, and instead find the heart of the book he is trying to adapt; to organically let his screenplay emerge. All the while, however, his brother's foray into screenwriting is epitomized by everything Charlie is trying to avoid. Donald talks incessantly about inciting incidents and act turning points, and even attends a notorious Robert McKee seminar. One scene visualizes this frisson beautifully: we see both Charlie and Donald in the same room, reading, and whereas Charlie is reading the book he is trying to adapt, Donald is reading McKee's screenwriting manual. This is a cute nod to screenwriters in the audience who know McKee's work and its approach.

What is really interesting about this film is how the pace and tone changes toward the end of the second act, linked to the brothers' preoccupations. As soon as Charlie invites Donald to New York to help him track down Susan, the film becomes much more like a traditional Hollywood film: everything that Donald epitomizes. So, whereas Charlie is seeking help so he can find the real meaning of the book from Susan herself, Donald's arrival changes the dynamic of the film from one concerned with themes and character psychology to one characterized by espionage, car chases, and eventual dramatic death. On the one hand, Donald's arrival destroys the story: it turns dark, and two characters get killed. On the other hand, Donald's arrival helps the story: through the structure now imposed on the characters, both Charlie and Susan find their emotional arc. Structure is thus both a friend and a foe: it moves the story on, but also destroys two of the people in it. And it is such complexities, raised through the film's intertextual layers, that make *Adaptation* a must-see for any screenwriter.

Working with Ideas

When thinking of ideas for screenplays, it is useful to look both outside and inside ourselves; to consider what is happening around us (socially, culturally, economically, politically), and what is happening within us (emotionally, psychologically). When

we put these two things together, processing the events happening around us into internal thoughts and feeling, we get theme and meaning. Then, when we put theme and meaning into the screenplay form (characters, world, plot, visual symbolism, etc.) we get storytelling. This is why we love screen stories: because they tell us about the world we live in, through a lens we understand (the human perspective).

Michael Rabiger's book, *Developing Story Ideas: Finding the Ideas You Haven't Yet Had*, asks its readers to think about the stories they want, and are able, to tell. His premise is that, as writers, we should take time to think about what we know and how it might be something that others want to know, too. We might think that we do not know anything, or at least anything new or different, but that is not true. We all know something, and although it might not be radical or different on the surface, it is new and exciting because it is seen through our own perspective. We can take the following example:

- Love
- Hatred
- Forgiveness
- Marriage
- Family
- Death

Every person's view on or interpretation of these ideas is different: different from that of our parents, our partner, our neighbor, etc. When we converse about these things with other people, what we say is interesting to them; and what they say is interesting to us, even if we do not agree with it. This is because each and every one of us has an insight that is interesting to someone else. We all have insights, and therefore we all have ideas. An elaborate, mind-blowing plot or a unique, multidimensional protagonist can be developed and crafted around an idea, but if the idea does not exist in the first place, these things will struggle to find meaning.

Although aimed at the study of advertising, Nik Mahon's book *Basics Advertising 03: Ideation* is really useful for teaching people how to develop creative ideas. Some of the processes a screenwriter goes through are much the same for an advertiser coming up with a new campaign. The basic premise is this: open yourself up to possibilities. If we approach an idea with a closed mind, thinking it is already perfect, then our screenplay will likely be unoriginal and uninspiring. If, instead, we allow our imagination to roam free, and ideas to grow and die, our screenplay will likely be more original and refreshing. In his book, Mahon discusses divergent and convergent thinking as a way to start embracing creativity in the development process. If we relate this to screenwriting, we can understand *divergent thinking* as thinking outside the box and looking in all directions for alternative ideas; as letting go of boundaries, logic and reasoning, and playing with these new ideas to see if they actually bring anything usable and fresh. For example, what if our protagonist was a serial killer as well as a schoolteacher? What if our antagonist was gay instead of straight?

What if, in our story, people are not allowed to talk about sex? We then understand *convergent thinking* as evaluating the ideas that have come out of divergent thinking and assessing their viability; as refocusing on the problem at hand and trying to match wild ideas with story credibility. From the wild ideas, is there potential for something to work? Is there a seed for growing something truly original?

Mahon also talks about the process of ideation, and how as creatives we go through four stages of idea development: preparation (brainstorming, fact finding, sampling); incubation (gestating, relaxing, reflecting); illumination (realizing, capturing, producing); and verification (evaluating, critiquing, reworking). Moving this forward for the screenwriter specifically, and considering the development work that takes place not just by them but also the script developer, producer, director, etc., we might use the following framework:

- *Plowing*: listening, observing, thinking, living, playing, experimenting, researching.
- *Processing*: building ideas into characters, plots and themes, finding a form, developing a structure, designing a cast, writing, finding out.
- *Pruning*: going back and reshaping, making further decisions about structure, cast, voice, style and tone, redrafting.
- *Pitching*: pitching as telling, pitching as selling, requiring feedback, understanding your idea and seeing it differently.
- *Polishing*: rewriting after feedback, revisiting screenwriting craft, honing.

The World of Your Story

Creating a compelling and convincing world is one of the most important aspects of screenwriting. It is also one of the least talked about. A world is infectious: it affects all other elements of your screenplay, from story to character to dialogue. It is not merely something that holds a screenplay together, either: it pulls and pushes it into shape. A well-crafted world can create a specific audience experience: a particular tone and feeling that the plot cannot convey on its own. A world also has innate dramatic potential, and our choice can both help and hinder how the story is told. A world can belong to a particular character, too, and by imposing a new world on that character, or bringing a new character into their world, we can create interesting, dramatic challenges that they have to deal with. A well-crafted world can also make a familiar, clichéd story feel alive, fresh, and inspiring. Many successful films take a classic story and set it in a different, sometimes unusual, world that helps to make it feel new and exciting, and relevant for a contemporary audience. Examples include *Pretty Woman* (1990), *Enchanted* (2007), *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) and *Million Dollar Baby* (2004).

Creating a world thus means far more than creating a location for the story to take place in. Location is important, but a screenplay world is also about the feel of the story: How does the world affect the tone of what we see? It is about internal

logic: How does the world operate? It is about the emotional experience of the audience: How is it generated by the world? It is a vessel for theme and meaning: What stories can be told in this world? And it is also about voicing a screenplay: Does the world have its own voice, attitude or perspective?

Paris, je t'aime (2006) is a film about a world: a collection of 18 short films celebrating Paris. Focusing on one arrondissement per short film, the collection as a whole explores what it is like to live in Paris, among all its beauty and disparity. The central theme is love: Paris as the city of love, and also why we love Paris. Although each short film has its own story world, from a comedy mime to a lascivious vampire to a grieving family, the compilation draws together its components to explore a single world: contemporary Paris, where there is something for everyone.

Ratatouille (2007) has two sets of internal logic to deal with. First of all, we need to understand that this is a world where rats talk – and cook! At the beginning, we see rats Remy and Emile living an "ordinary" life. They scrounge for food in an old lady's house, at the same time making conversation, watching TV, and joking about Remy's knowledge of cooking. This is important in setting up the logic of a film where rats share the characteristics and intelligence of humans. Remy finding himself in Paris is also important because it gives us a sense of reality: this is a place we know, and icons like the Eiffel Tower and Arc de Triomphe help us to locate this reality.

As the story develops, we need to understand a new internal logic: Remy "controlling" Linguini and helping him cook wonderful things. This is an important part of the story because it is what puts Linguini in jeopardy in the first place: because Remy can cook, but everyone else thinks it is Linguini, the challenge comes for Linguini to help restore the reputation of the restaurant. To show us this new internal logic, a training sequence shows Remy and Linguini figuring out ways of working together, Remy controlling Linguini's arms to stir, chop, etc.

Juno (2007) starts by showing us the world of Juno MacGuff, a down-to-earth world of family, friends, wisecracking shopkeepers, and importantly, teenage pregnancy. Juno herself guides us through this world through point-of-view and humorous commentary. When she becomes pregnant and decides to give the baby up for adoption, we are taken into a whole new world: that of Vanessa and Mark Loring, chosen by Juno as the baby's adoptive parents. As soon as we meet them, we are in a totally different world, one that is going to change Juno somehow and also that Juno herself may change. Visually, the two worlds are starkly different. Juno lives in a neighborhood where the houses are small, close together, and have a definite "lived in" look. Vanessa and Mark live in a pristine world where the houses are big, separated, and look more like show homes. On her first visit Juno explores the house, sneaking into the bathroom and trying out Vanessa's creams and perfumes. This is something she is definitely not used to, her stepmother being more interested in collecting pictures and ornaments of dogs.

The two worlds are differentiated by dialogue, too, creating a distinctive voice for each. From the conversations we hear, we glean a strong sense of what these worlds are about. Juno's world is characterized by pee sticks, Sunny D, pregnancy as a

problem, pork swords, menstruation, barfing, bacon bits, condoms, balls, a garbage dump of a situation, sea monkeys, Taco Bell, tanning beds, and t-shirt guns. In stark contract, the Lorings' world is characterized by pregnancy as beauty, vitamin water, legal terminology, ginseng coolers, custard and cheesecake yellow paint, reading books about childbirth, and the processes of bringing up a child. Through such dialogue, we feel how the worlds work and what they mean to their respective characters.

Understanding Character

Screenplays with weak characters are films that do not work. Sometimes a protagonist's backstory has not been fully explored, resulting in a plot that fails to connect with its audience because there is nothing of interest to them; nothing at stake for them to care about. This was the case with *Wimbledon* (2004), a vacuous film that pretended it was about something by shoehorning a forced slice of Peter's backstory into the end, rather than letting it drive the story from the start. Sometimes it is hard to work out who the protagonist and antagonist are, and therefore how the story is supposed to be understood. This was the case with *The Family Stone* (2005), a sloppy film that kept shifting allegiances between characters Meredith and Sybil, ending in a sentimental death scene that had no effect because we were led to despise Sybil. And sometimes the cast of characters has not been considered properly, resulting in too many characters to care about, such as *Love Actually* (2003), or not enough characters to challenge the protagonist, making it hard to feel they deserve to succeed, such as *Coco before Chanel* (2009).

Most screenplays guide us through the story by the protagonist's point-of-view, but some use this as their selling point. The point-of-view being followed might be surprising, refreshing, or perhaps challenging. *Monster* (2003) is fascinating because it is told through the eyes of a real-life serial killer. The framing of the film, hooking us from the start with empathetic voiceover, helps this to work. *We Need to Talk about Kevin* (2011) tells us a tragic story about a mass murderer through the eyes of his mother. It would have been easy to tell this story through the eyes of the police or a family member of one of the victims, but by choosing the murderer's mother, we see that she too is a victim of his crime as she tries to work out whether she is to blame. *Shutter Island* (2010) plays with our perceptions of truth by making us doubt the protagonist's story. During the middle of the film, we start to question Teddy's voice as we are given a different point-of-view of the events: that he is clinically mad and we should not believe a word he says. With this comes a shift in the drive of the story, from Teddy solving the mystery of a missing person to him working out the mystery of his own life.

It is not only individual characters that are important to a screenplay, but also the relationships they are in. A character on their own can only show us so much; a character in relation to others can provide information about emotions, attitudes, values, and power. Although a character is almost always consistent, they can show different

sides when they are with other characters. This allows the audience to see for themselves the complexity and depth of the story, without it having to be spelt out in expositional ways.

This is where cast design is important. Essentially, it is about finding the right set of characters to tell your story; the right cast to explore the world and its themes. Relationships between characters are important both dramatically and thematically. Depicting both conflict and camaraderie, they force characters to show what they want, challenge them in their emotional arc, and make them act and react to events going on around them. When crafted well, these relationships can also vibrate with deeper thematic meaning, reflecting the central character's journey or theme. With good cast design, then, we can tell our audience about many aspects of the world we live in, about our values as a writer, and by exploring such relationships we can echo our audience's own hopes, fears, successes, and failures.

When designing a cast for a screenplay, we might consider the following:

- Who needs to be in the story world? Who does the protagonist need to be in conflict and camaraderie with in order to undergo an emotional arc?
- How many characters in the story are key players, and how many are secondary? What are their relationships to one another? Who loves and hates whom?
- Considering them as a dramatic whole, what is this cast about? How are they connected (family, place, theme, job, etc.), and how are they disconnected?
- What makes the cast distinctive? How is it balanced with a mixture of characters, defined by age, appearance, status, role, personality, etc.?
- What binds the cast together in hard times? As a dramatic whole, what do they all represent?

A useful book to consult is William Indick's *Psychology for Screenwriters*, which applies the work of various psychologists to screenwriting. Two of these, Carl Jung and Rollo May, are concerned with character archetypes, which is useful for understanding character functions; and because these works help us to understand *character functions* as opposed to *character execution*, we can understand the roles that characters take in a story, both individually and collectively. We learn that most characters in a screenplay reflect aspects of the protagonist, and that the protagonist needs to integrate their qualities in order to succeed on their journey.

The Kids Are All Right (2010) is a good illustration of well-crafted cast design resulting in dynamic character relationships. Mother Nic and daughter Joni (to whom she gave birth) are very similar: academic, ambitious, somewhat sheltered. Second mother Jules and son Laser (to whom she gave birth) are very similar: not so academic, doers, enjoying life. Sperm donor father Paul is more like Jules and Laser, though he is successful as well, with his own thriving business. When all of these characters are brought together, some really interesting and complex transformations take place. Nic, for example, becomes even more extreme in her control of the family, before eventually relaxing and connecting with Paul. Jules becomes even more frivolous by

embarking on a sexual affair with Paul, though when he confesses to falling in love with her, she retracts and misses all the things she has with Nic. Interestingly, it is through the same scene that we see these reversals. Nic finally "lets go" and enjoys Paul's company, complimenting him on his cooking and singing a Joni Mitchell song with him. Jules, however, is now fearful of the secret coming out, and seeing Nic and Paul get along makes her uncomfortable and paranoid. It is when Nic goes to the bathroom and finds Jules's hair that the story takes a different turn: the secret comes out.

Playing out underneath all of this is Joni's character arc. She is academic, focused and prudish, but learning about the harsh realities of life through the revelation of Jules and Paul's affair, she drops her guard, gets drunk and kisses friend Jai. She soon regrets this, but has at least learnt about herself, life, and other people. What is interesting here is that it is her friend Sasha who has been encouraging her to "get it on" with Jai from the very start. There are clear parallels here between their relationship and Nic and Jules's relationship, which provides great dramatic texture and, through parallel character pairings, reinforces the themes of identity, experimentation, and being true to oneself. Laser's arc, albeit on a smaller scale, is also important in this web of character relationships. Through Paul, who advises him and shows him a way of being true to himself, he ditches his controlling, aggressive friend Clay. Again, there is a really interesting parallel here with Nic and Jules, who also share some of these traits and problems.

Dealing with Structure

Although some screenwriters have negative views about structure, good screenwriters know how to use it effectively. They are not bound by it, nor are they afraid of it; instead, they use it to get to the soul of their story, and play with it openly when their heart tells them it is not working. It is easy to see why some of the structural terminology used in screenwriting, such as inciting incident, act turning point, midpoint and climax, can be off-putting and appear formulaic; but in fact it is only a way of expressing what we already know and do. We all experience moments where something big happens that calls into question our actions, views or beliefs – the inciting incident; and we all experience times when we suddenly find ourselves doubting our actions, and majorly reconsider what we are doing – the midpoint. Our screen characters experience these, too, and so giving such moments a name is not about enforcing rules or rigidity, but about creating a language we can all understand and enjoy.

The word *journey* is used a lot in screenwriting when discussing structure. It is a way of expressing the arc that the protagonist undergoes, both emotionally and physically, and because it is a progression of time, the word journey usefully encapsulates the notion of a character moving forward. Some films have obvious journeys, such as adventure stories and road movies. *Big Fish* (2003) and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994) are clear examples. Other films have more subtle journeys,

such as redemption plots and personal dramas. Examples include *The Lives of Others* (2006) and *Girl, Interrupted* (1999).

Journeys are composed of two parts: the *physical journey* and the *emotional journey*. Like strands of DNA, they intertwine to create the fabric of screenplay structure. They represent story and plot: *story*, what the screenplay is about, and *plot*, how that is told, through action. Story without plot is not a screenplay, but an idea; plot without a story is directionless and meaningless. *Prometheus* (2012) is a good example of this: a film that had special effects, fast-paced action and even a vivid story world, but no story. What was that film really about? Whose journey was it? Apart from wondering what these paranormal entities were, why were we supposed to care about the characters in this film? There was clear potential to use Elizabeth as an emotional guide through the story, but the screenplay felt underdeveloped, with little sense of an emotional arc. This is why it is always fruitful to think of our screenplay as a physical representation of an emotional arc; a plot used to tell a story, one that through the telling releases at least one but usually a series of universal themes.

The physical journey is what the character wants. As an audience, we see them trying to achieve something physical: a tangible goal that we see them literally in pursuit of, driven by a motivation usually brought about by the inciting incident. The emotional journey is what happens to the character as a result of pursuing their want: we see and feel them undergoing an emotional arc. It is what the character needs: the subconscious desire that has been driving them all along.

A simple yet effective way to find the key beats of a screenplay is to identify its structural *tent poles*: its key turning points that metaphorically prop the story up. Moments like these are what readers of screenplays often look for: the big action, the dramatic twists, etc. Tent poles are useful because not only do they drive and direct the story, they give us milestones to work toward when plotting and writing. There are eight tent poles in a screenplay, which are:

- Status Quo
- Inciting Incident/Catalyst
- End of Act 1 Turning Point
- Act 2 Midpoint
- End of Act 2 Turning Point
- Hardest Choice
- Climax/Final Battle
- Resolution and End

Each tent pole is usually summarized in a sentence or two, used to define the core of what its function is. An example of the tent pole structure for the film *Leap Year* (2010) would be:

- *Status Quo*   Anna, a super-organized, rich real estate "home stager," desperately wants to get married. Her fiancé, Jeremy, goes away to Dublin on busi-

ness; but as it is leap year, she decides to follow him and pop the question herself.

- *Inciting Incident/Catalyst* Terrible weather forces Anna's plane to land in Wales. She is stranded, but determined to get to Ireland. She eventually reaches a place called Dingle, but it is at the other end of the country from where she needs to be.

- *End of Act 1 Turning Point* After a disastrous start to her journey, offending the locals and decimating the room she is staying in, she reluctantly accepts the help of local guy Declan. They hate each other, but she has no choice: he has a car and knows the way.

- *Act 2 Midpoint* The first half of Act 2 sees the journey getting worse and worse. Anna is totally out of her comfort zone with Declan, and encounters obstacles such as stray cattle, thieves, falling down a muddy hill, and missing the one and only train to Dublin. They are invited to a B&B, but they have to pretend to be married, which includes them having to kiss in front of the owners and other guests (the midpoint).

- *End of Act 2 Turning Point* Seeing a different side to him, and knowing the truth about his past relationship, Anna warms to Declan. They have begun to share happy times on their journey, Anna learning to loosen up and have fun, but now the journey has come to an end and they have reached Dublin – and Jeremy.

- *Hardest Choice* There is a sense that Anna has changed her mind about Jeremy and fallen in love with Declan, but all is scuppered when Jeremy surprises her with his own proposal. Anna accepts and goes back to Boston with Jeremy, leaving Declan to go back to Dingle alone (false ending).

- *Climax/Final Battle* Something is not right in Boston, and when Anna realizes that Jeremy proposed to her just so they could get the apartment they wanted, and that he cares more about his belongings than her, she leaves the life she always wanted.

- *Resolution and End* Anna goes back to Dingle and declares her love for Declan, saying that he is all she needed. She gets the proposal she always dreamed of when he asks her to marry him. She accepts and they kiss.

Referred to above, the *inciting incident* is an important moment, or series of moments, in a screenplay. Occurring during Act 1, it is the key disturbance of the story that sets everything in motion; the moment of disequilibrium in the protagonist's world. The inciting incident propels the protagonist on their journey, more often than not appearing as a problem posed or a challenge set. Character motivation is important in screenwriting, and this is where the inciting incident comes into play. Essentially, if the protagonist does not have an impetus to undertake the challenge that has been set, then the story can lack conviction and we might not care if they achieve their goal or not. Therefore, the inciting incident offers a dilemma or crisis where the

protagonist must decide whether to undertake the challenge or not – for better or for worse.

Writing Visually

We often talk about *visual grammar* in screenwriting; even some script reports/coverage require assessors to write about it specifically. But what does it actually mean, and why do we put the word grammar, which is associated with linguistics, with the word visual? The answer is that it is a way for the screenwriter to compose the screen to elicit a specific meaning, just like the use of grammar in language. An action sequence, the use of an object in a scene, even a character movement or gesture, are all ways of punctuating the screen (and, when writing, the page) to make the story understood in the way intended. Just as we use full stops, commas, and paragraph breaks in writing to give sense to the page, as screenwriters we employ visual techniques to do the same. Let us look at the following example:

> Xavier *strides up the path*. He suddenly *stops*, and *takes a deep breath*.
> He *raises his hand* to press the bell, but *hovers his finger* over it, unsure whether to press it.
> A moment, then he *lowers his finger* and *puts his hand into his back pocket*. He *looks to the floor*.
> Another moment, then he *looks up* again. He *stares at the door* before *backtracking down the path*.

There are many specific actions here that help to give meaning to the scene. The scene could quite easily have been written in a line, but it would have been hollow and failed to give a sense of Xavier's dilemma. Instead, by visually punctuating the scene with action and gesture, the scene comes to life and we get a much better understanding of what is happening.

Thinking visually is like thinking musically: composing the screen through specific beats of action and gesture to give rhythm and tempo. This helps a reader to feel how the scene will play out, which also helps them to see it in their mind, making it much more visual on the page. If the example above were written in a simpler way – *Xavier walks up to the door and hesitates, before turning back* – the scene would have no rhythm, and no real understanding of character. Composing it musically, with specific "notes," it comes to life both on the page and in the reader's mind.

Using *valued objects*, physical items that reappear several times in a screenplay, is a way of writing visually to reflect theme, chart a character's physical and/or emotional growth, and where relevant, provide humor (such as a twist). What the valued object does is give visual symbolism and pleasure to an audience, who recognize it and actively make meaning about its function. In *The Kids Are All Right*, the hat that Paul gives Joni is important because it symbolizes their bonding and her need for a father

figure in her life. Later, when she is packing up to go to university, she leaves the hat behind, symbolizing that she no longer needs Paul, especially after all that has happened. Similarly, when Jules first goes to Paul's garden, seeing him on her own for the first time, she is wearing a hat: she uses it to cover herself up, symbolizing her feelings of self-doubt. Later, when she begins to find her true self and becomes more confident with who she is, the hat disappears and she shows her flowing red hair. Her hair is important here, too, as it is what reveals her secret affair when Nic finds it on Paul's pillow.

In *Leap Year*, the Louis Vuitton case is symbolic of Anna's character arc. It is characteristic of her organized, designer, capsule lifestyle, which she lets go of at the end of the film to become less pretentious, with more freedom to explore herself. We see numerous scenes where, no matter what Anna is doing, she is pulling along her trusted LV case; she cannot let go of it, just as she cannot let go of her structured life. However, the case is stolen by a group of hoodlums. This metaphorically threatens her life, as she cannot live without it. When Declan then retrieves it for her, putting his own life in danger by doing so, Anna's perceptions are suddenly changed and we start to sense that she and Declan will fall in love after all. This object, then, is important because as well as revealing character, it provides a plot point that weaves itself into Anna's emotional arc.

Using Voiceover

Screenwriters are often told to avoid voiceover. It is seen as cheating; as being lazy, and not striving for ways to cleverly convey what is happening in a character's mind. Voiceover can be cheating when used badly, but when considered carefully and used effectively, it can actually be sophisticated and add something special to a screenplay.

The general assumption with voiceover is that we simply write what characters are thinking. This is lazy voiceover because it is merely writing a character's internal thoughts, rather than trying to visualize them. Good voiceover does not just tell us what a character is thinking: it gives us a point-of-view about a situation, and complements the images we see on screen. In this way, it is not about characters narrating the imagery, but rather characters giving us a way to understand it. Effective voiceover is written with perspective, allowing us to step into the life of the character and not just hear what they are saying about the here and now. Voiceover is sometimes juxtaposed to what we see on screen, giving us an insight into who the character really is by engaging us to understand why they are seeing things differently from us.

American Beauty (1999) begins with a voiceover from Lester, telling us what he thinks of his life. He talks directly to us about his feelings of loss and disconnection. Although we see some of the things he is talking about, such as his slippers, his wife, and his neighbors, he is not telling us what we are seeing: he is telling us *about* what

we are seeing, giving it perspective. This provides us with a clear insight into his dramatic problem that goes on to drive the film.

Big Fish uses voiceover in a textured, sophisticated, and highly engaging way. It is a film about storytelling, about people learning through stories and passing them down through generations, and so voiceover is entirely appropriate. From the start, we learn through voiceover that the film will span many years and many perspectives. We hear three voices, two from Ed at different ages, and one from his son, Will. Voiceover is interlaced with visual flashbacks of the stories being told, which as well as forcing us to work out what is going on and who is who, reinforces the idea of stories being passed down through generations, each time with slightly different flavors. By the end of the film we learn that this is also a story about belief, so having a series of voiceovers that tell us these stories, in all their varieties, reinforces this theme. In this way, the use of voiceover in *Big Fish* is not lazy nor a gimmick – it is a dramatic necessity.

Conclusion

It has only been possible to touch the tip of the iceberg of writing the screenplay, but hopefully it has been illuminating. Many of the core craft skills necessary to write a screenplay have been covered, though as highlighted at the start, they have moved away somewhat from the "usual" advice given. The ideas have not been radical, per se; rather, some new perspectives on the craft of screenwriting have been offered and presented in an "unusual" combination. It would have been very easy in a chapter like this to give simple, hackneyed "how to" advice: creating a character, developing a three-act structure, writing dialogue, constructing a scene, etc.

As outlined at the start, there is so much to say about screenwriting, and in so many ways: the "how to" approach, academic contextualization, academically informed practice guidance, etc. A number of screenwriting texts and film examples have been referred to throughout the chapter, and it is hoped that you will follow these up in your own time, in your own way. You may watch one of the films mentioned and have a different understanding, which is not a bad thing. As with all creative writing, screenwriting can be very subjective, driven by personal feelings, experiences, and points of reference. One hopes always to present a balanced view, especially when offering textual analysis, but if you find yourself seeing something slightly differently or even vehemently opposing an analysis given – here or from anyone else discussing screenwriting – do not panic; in fact, embrace it! We write screenplays because we want to affect people, and because we are all different there are bound to be multiple readings. As screenwriters our hope is that everyone will agree with what we are saying, and feel what we are presenting, but just because everyone does not, it does not mean we have failed. It just means that there are other perspectives out there, which means other stories that need to be told. So as long as we keep telling stories, and writing screenplays, we cannot really complain.

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8
New Media Writing

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Imagine that you are sitting in a darkened movie theater, intently wrapped up in the film you are watching. The hero, an inexperienced young soldier, is on patrol with his squadron in an East Asian jungle, fighting against stealthy, battle-hardened opponents. As he heads down a faint trail through the dense foliage, you realize he is about to step into a pit trap laced with sharpened bamboo spikes. You know the trap is there and you desperately want to stop him from falling into it, but of course, as a member of the audience, there's nothing you can do to warn him or stop him.

But let's say instead that this is a work of New Media, and the same scene is about to play out. In this case, if you are the user or player of this work, the scenario could develop entirely differently, thanks to interactivity. You might have several options. You could perhaps guide him around the pit trap or you might instead have a fellow soldier grab him before he could fall in. Or you might have the hero notice something suspicious in the trail just ahead of him, and stop of his own volition. Or, if you chose, you could even allow him to fall into the trap. In other words, you could interact directly with the story and have a significant impact on how it proceeds.

Now, imagine yourself as the writer of this war story, in its New Media form. Think how enormously different it would be to script the interactive version rather than the traditional movie version. You would need to determine all the choices that would be available when the soldier was nearing the trap, plus the outcome of each choice. This is known as an *if/then construct*: If the player does X, then Y will happen.

Each choice the player makes will result in a different outcome and a different story path, and each of these needs to be scripted. But since, as a writer, you can never know

what choice the player will make, you have to give up the idea of having a clear-cut linear structure as you would with a movie or play. You can no longer depend on Scene A being followed by Scene B, which is then followed by Scene C, and so on. Instead, Scene A might be followed by Scene G, which is then followed by Scene C. In essence, this is nonlinearity in action – the absence of a strict sequential order of scenes.

Thus, in designing and writing a work of New Media, the writer no longer has complete control over how a story will unfold – control that is virtually god-like in established media like stage plays, novels and movies. Instead, a writer needs to find ways to invite the audience to participate in the narrative and, in a sense, share in the creative process.

For some writers, it is extremely uncomfortable to relinquish their vice-like grip over how a story proceeds. Opening up the story to allow for interactivity and audience participation feels foreign and not at all the type of experience they bargained for when they chose to become a storyteller. However, as a writer who has worked in New Media almost from its earliest days, since the early 1990s, and who has also worked in almost every form of established media, including television dramas and feature films, I can attest to the fact that this young field offers unprecedented creative satisfactions.

New Media, New Storytelling Opportunities

It is all due to the invention of the computer chip that New Media storytelling even exists, and it is still an extremely new field. The first successful video game wasn't released until 1972, and the World Wide Web didn't come along for about another 20 years. Yet in this short space of time, computer technology has offered us an ever growing array of new platforms to deliver stories to our audience. These platforms include familiar media vehicles like the Internet, video game consoles, and mobile devices. They also include more esoteric platforms like virtual reality, immersive environments, smart toys, interactive cinema and interactive TV.

Even more importantly when it comes to storytelling, computer technology allows for narrative content to be broken into the tiny pieces that support interactivity. This, as demonstrated in our hypothetical New Media version of the war story, profoundly impacts the story. (It should be noted, however, that not all works of New Media avail themselves of interactivity. Those that do not are essentially no different than other screen-based works, except that they are delivered via digital platforms.)

Though this new form of storytelling is still so young, it has much in common with older forms of storytelling. It contains plot, is held together by structure, and contains compelling characters. Furthermore, as with all forms of engaging storytelling, dramatic conflicts of one sort or another are commonly at the heart of these new stories, and we – the players or users of the work – are eager to see how the conflicts are resolved.

Still, the differences between older media and New Media are profound. These differences are often referred to as "lean back" versus "lean forward" storytelling. In a traditional storytelling experience like a movie, play or television show, the audience leans back passively in theater chairs or couches, letting the story come to them. But in a New Media experience, the player or user actively engages in the story, leaning forward to control it through a keyboard or mouse or joystick or other form of controller. Thanks to interactivity, audience members are given a unique new power called *agency*. Agency is the user or player's ability to make meaningful choices within the narrative and then experience the results of those choices. Through agency, the user or player can help determine the fate of important characters within the narrative, shape how the story will develop, and even determine how it will end.

Of course, it is up to the writer to create ways for the audience to interact with the story. Some forms of interactivity are extremely simple and have no significant impact on the narrative. Thus, the agency they offer is extremely limited. For example, in the early children's interactive storybooks I worked on and also in today's mobile apps, young users can click on various objects and trigger amusing animations. For instance, if there's a chicken egg on the screen, the child can click it and the egg might crack and a baby chick might emerge. This form of interactivity is great fun for the young players but doesn't change the core story in any way or offer any agency.

A more significant form of interactivity and agency was offered in another work for children that I wrote, *Shelly Duvall Presents Digby's Adventures: Tales of a 1-Pound Dog*. In this story, Digby, a little Yorkie, gets lost in three different ways. The child could select the way in which Digby gets lost, and then help the little dog find his way home again. As the writer, I had the opportunity to devise the three different ways that Digby would become lost and all the different routes he could take to get home again. I also invented an extremely large cast of characters for Digby to interact with, including nocturnal "creatures of the night," like a skunk, a possum, and a raccoon. At first, all you could see of these nocturnal animals were their shining eyes, but when you clicked on the eyes, the full character would appear and introduce himself to you.

Another series of games I worked on at about the same time, and also for children, offered even more agency to its players. The series *Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego?* is about a group of thieves who routinely steal valuable objects. The title character, Carmen Sandiego, is their ringleader. In each round of the game, one of the gang steals a treasure of some kind. You play a detective and your goal is to catch the thief. You do this by solving a series of clues that will enable you to track the thief down and bring him or her to justice. Agency comes from the satisfaction of solving the clues and arresting the thieves. And you can also be rewarded for your sleuthing skills by advancing from rookie detective status up to a high-ranking member of the detective force.

As a writer for the Carmen series, I would write hundreds of clues for characters to give to the players, making this dialogue as amusing as possible. In addition, I wrote dozens of lines of dialogue for the Chief of Detectives, the player's cranky boss,

and for Wanda, the lady who would issue arrest warrants when the player successfully tracked the thieves down.

Unlike writing dialogue for a TV show or film, however, where a line is delivered only once, I would write as many as a dozen variations of each line of dialogue for Wanda and the Chief of Detectives, since players would be interacting with these characters on a regular basis and in very similar circumstances. For instance, I had to come up with numerous ways for Wanda to agree to issue an arrest warrant or to deny you one, telling you that you hadn't solved the case yet. It is typical for video game writers to write many versions of the same line, so that the dialogue sounds fresh and spontaneous instead of canned.

In some New Media works, you create interactive dialogue sequences between the users and characters in the story. For the users' part of the dialogue, you write several different lines of dialogue for each exchange and let them pick one. The fictional characters will respond differently to each dialogue choice, and of course you write these responses as well.

In addition to agency, New Media narratives have other characteristics that make them extremely different from traditional media. They include nonlinearity, the inclusion of gaming elements, the breaking of the fourth wall, and immersiveness. I'll describe each of these in more detail and discuss how they impact storytelling a little later. But first let me go back to a point I made early on, that New Media contains elements that are present in all forms of storytelling: Characters, plot, and a structure, as well as dramatic conflict. But here is where things get even more interesting, because the unique characteristics that New Media brings to the storytelling party profoundly change even these familiar attributes of narrative.

Characters in Works of New Media

Works of New Media contain the two classic types of characters that have come down to us from Greek theater: the protagonist and the antagonist. The protagonist is usually our hero, and is typically trying to achieve a highly desired goal of some sort: the capture of a dangerous fugitive, the solving of a murder mystery, or saving his or her community from an invasion of dangerous foes. The antagonist, on the other hand, is usually the enemy of the protagonist and is powerful enough to prevent the hero from succeeding at the longed-for goal. In addition, these stories can contain a large cast of supporting characters: allies, henchmen, informants, and characters who primarily add color or humor to the story.

Yes, these all sound like characters we'd meet in every other kind of story we'd hear, read or see. But, in the case of New Media, there's a major twist: you, the player, can actually *be* the protagonist. In many of these works, you are represented by an onscreen figure, an *avatar*, who graphically represents you throughout the story. In many cases, you have the option of selecting your stand-in's gender, physical appearance, and wardrobe, and even some special skills from a wide assortment of possibili-

ties. Some New Media genres, like Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs), contain a cast of thousands of user-controlled avatars. The other characters are controlled by the computer and are known as Non Player Characters (NPCs).

If the players or users can have so much say in what the protagonists will be like and how they act, you might wonder what is left for you, as the writer or narrative designer, to do. Actually, you have an even larger a job to do in terms of character development than you would in a traditional story. Not only is it up to you to create all the possible characteristics the avatars can possess, but it is also up to you to design protagonists that are well suited to interactive dramas and to the particular story worlds they inhabit.

Protagonists in these dramas need to be active and offer the user or player meaningful agency within the story. New Media protagonists are imbued with what is often referred to as a *verb set*: a group of actions that they can perform within the story world. These include such staples as running, jumping, and shooting, as well as more esoteric ones like casting spells and shape shifting.

Not all protagonists are represented by avatars, however. In some cases, the user just plays as himself or herself. This is true, for example, of the *Carmen Sandiego* series. While you, the user, play as an aspiring detective and try to catch various henchmen of the famous Carmen, you never see yourself on the screen and have no personality other than your own, though it is implied by the act of playing the game that you want to be the best detective you can be. In instances like the *Carmen* series, there is no character development for the protagonist at all, though writers still need to give users a verb set and also give them the ability to make choices throughout the story. But the protagonist in these cases is a blank slate, and the slate is filled in by the user's own personality, by the way the user employs the verb set, and the choices he or she makes at each juncture where choice is possible.

At the other end of the spectrum are the fully formed protagonists with detailed backstories, well-developed personalities and clearly defined abilities, and they are depicted on the screen by animations constructed by the developers, not the users. These characters often have the ability to change and grow during the story. In cases of preformed protagonists, the user just steps, almost literally, into the character's shoes and "becomes" the character, overcoming the challenges thrown at him or her as best as possible.

Protagonists in works of New Media may also have a major flaw or two, just as with Shakespeare's great protagonists – Hamlet with his indecisiveness or Othello with his jealousy. But in works of New Media, we as writers often give our protagonist the opportunity to overcome their flaws. Since these stories have multiple narrative possibilities, however, the same work may contain one story path where the protagonist overcomes the flaw and another path where the flaw becomes the character's undoing.

Whether or not we give our protagonist flaws, we do strive to make them memorable and resonate with our audience. Ideally, our characters should display genuine

human emotions and be capable of eliciting strong emotions on the part of our audience.

Because New Media storytelling involves active participation on the part of the player or user, these stories need to contain a strong and clear-cut conflict between the protagonist and antagonist. While interior, emotional conflicts may work well in a novel and to some degree in stage plays (*Hamlet*, for instance), they are badly suited for New Media narratives, which call for strong, external conflicts. The more powerful a threat the antagonist poses, the more exciting and absorbing the work will be for the player. This antagonist's motivation should be believable and logical, and should put him or her in direct conflict with the protagonist. It is also a nice touch to give the antagonist a tragic flaw, because it will make this character more believable and interesting. The more fully developed and lifelike the antagonist, the more interesting the story will be.

Ideally, protagonist and antagonist should be well matched. If your antagonist is vastly more powerful than your protagonist, the protagonist will have no hope of victory and the player will lose interest. On the other hand, if the antagonist is too weak, victory will come too easily and the work will not be challenging enough to hold anyone's attention. Often a New Media work will contain an entire series of antagonists, each one more threatening than the previous one, with the ultimate antagonist, often referred to as the *boss monster*, being the most daunting and powerful of all. If there's a whole series of antagonists, such as an army of space aliens, it makes the work far richer to make each one unique in some way so they don't seem as if they've all been stamped out of the same cookie cutter.

As a writer of New Media narratives, you have the pleasure of developing these two important figures for your works, the protagonist and antagonist, along with the entire cast of supporting characters. The more of an individual you make each character, even the minor ones, the richer your work will be. Anonymous, identical characters are as dull in interactive works as they are in traditional narratives.

Plot in Works of New Media

Even though works of New Media may be nonlinear and plot points don't follow each other in a fixed order, it doesn't mean that they lack strong storylines. Often, pieces of the story are discovered as the user navigates through the fictional universe. Structure, which will be discussed a little further on, helps tie the bits of story together in a way that makes sense.

Because interactive stories consist of numerous choices and each choice leads to a different outcome (the if/then construct), these works inevitably fan out into multiple story paths, a common feature of New Media known as *branching storylines*. To illustrate what they look like, let's go back to our war story, with the young soldier heading toward the booby trap.

We have hypothesized earlier that the user may have the option of helping the soldier avoid the trap, or alternatively, may let him fall into it. If our hero falls in, the story may have our character taken prisoner and confined in a prison camp. Plot points and choices from then on may involve how he behaves while being interrogated, how he treats his prison guards and fellow prisoners, and his attempt at breaking out of the prison. Each choice may have immediate consequences or the consequences may not be implemented until much later in the story. For example, if he treats one of the prison guards with respect and kindness, this guard may be grateful for this and may be instrumental in helping him out of a hazardous situation much later in time.

Let's now suppose that as the soldier approaches the trap, the user finds a way to help him safely avoid it. In this case, the story will proceed in a very different way. The story may continue with the soldier fighting his first big battle. During the battle itself, the users' actions and choices may determine still other story paths. If he fails to take adequate cover, he may be badly wounded and the story may continue as the soldier is taken to a military hospital. It may then proceed as a story about how well or poorly he deals with his wounds and his return to civilian life. But if he fights well, he and his fellow soldiers may defeat their enemies and the story may continue back at the base camp with a rowdy celebration fueled by a great deal of alcohol. This may lead to other story possibilities, such as their enemies taking advantage of their drunken state and springing a surprise attack, or our young soldier getting into an ill-advised argument with his superior officer.

As a writer, you need to figure out how each if/then scenario will play out, not just at the specific choice or action point, but all the way through the work. As you can imagine, you will quickly be creating multiple story paths, and the user may only experience a tiny portion of them. A single interactive work may contain as many storylines as multiple full-length movies. This can be an enormous waste of assets in terms of building the work, since each storyline will need to be produced. Fortunately, as we will see in a little while, New Media also offers a number of structural techniques to limit these branching storylines.

In some types of New Media works, however, these multiple storylines are highly desirable and the writer has the freedom to fully develop each of them, creating an enormous narrative canvas. This is one of the most satisfying gifts that New Media bequeaths to writers. Instead of being restricted to a single plot line, as you are with a screenplay, or perhaps having one main plot and one subplot, the writer can have the luxury of creating multiple entwining storylines and a vast cast of characters.

Such massive narratives are a feature of a relatively new type of fictional work, a form called *transmedia storytelling*. These works tell an interconnected story over a number of different media, and each medium tells a different facet of the story or enables the user to participate in the work in some way. It is common for transmedia stories to harness together components made for both established media and digital media. Established media elements can include such things as novels, feature films and TV series, while digital media elements can include video games, mobile apps,

and websites. Often, the writers will even script live events as part of the story experience, and professional actors will portray some of the story's fictional characters.

Developing and writing a narrative on the scale of transmedia storytelling is an enormous undertaking, and to my mind, one of the most exciting opportunities a writer can be given. These stories are so vast that they are usually developed by an entire team of writers, though individual writers are assigned to a single element. A head writer or producer makes sure that all the elements fit together and are consistent with the storyworld that is being constructed.

It should also be noted that some works of transmedia storytelling are nonfiction stories. These nonfiction endeavors may offer up multi-component documentaries or they may be a nonprofit organization's way of telling its story both to raise awareness of its cause and raise needed funds. As with fictional transmedia storytelling, it is typical to offer its intended audience a way to actively participate in the story. For example, the Nature Conservancy, a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting the environment and wildlife, sponsors a popular photography competition as part of the story it tells about itself. Not surprisingly, contestants must take photos of natural subjects, which is a perfect fit with its overall mission and story.

Structure in Works of New Media

Structure is probably the most challenging aspect of New Media storytelling. To date, very few structural models have been articulated or defined. The field lacks a brilliant theorist like Aristotle, who in his seminal work, *The Poetics*, lucidly described the elements of the three-act structure widely found in Greek theater. Though *The Poetics* was written over 2,000 years ago, Aristotle's work holds up amazingly well today and the three-act structure is still the fundamental structural model not only used in theatrical works but also in the writing of screenplays.

Even though no Aristotle for New Media has come along yet to define how structure works in interactive storytelling, there is no question that structure is every bit as essential in these new stories as they were in ancient Greek theater. Without structure, we would have no way to control the branching storylines so they don't get out of control and no way to connect the various pieces of story in our works. Structure also helps ensure that the users of our works have a satisfying experience – that they are given sufficient agency to feel they have meaningful input into the work but are not overwhelmed by choices.

Most software developers tend to use and reuse structural models that are well suited for the types of works they create, whether they be games, interactive stories for the web, or educational applications. As a New Media writer, if you are hired to work for an established developer, you will generally work with a team within the organization who will teach you their favored structural form. In general, New Media is a highly collaborative field, and it is common for people to work together on a project as a team.

Still, as a New Media writer, it is helpful to understand the basic models utilized in the field. This is particularly important if you are working on a project with a new organization or are developing your own work from scratch. Though there is not space in this chapter to detail all the structural models available to you, I will review a few basic ones.

Three oft-used structures are the *string of pearls*, *the level*, and the *hub and spoke*. The string of pearls model is particularly well suited to works with a sequential story path, but where some degree of freedom will also be offered. Within this model, the story is broken into a series of worlds, or pearls, each connected to the other, as with a pearl necklace. Each pearl is a miniature story world, with its own setting, cast of characters, little pieces of narrative, and tasks that need to be performed and challenges to be overcome. Users are free to move around and explore within each pearl and to interact with the elements inside it. But in order to advance to the next pearl, it is necessary to successfully complete certain challenges or puzzles within the current pearl.

The level, which is the structure most often used in video games, is similar to the string of pearls in that the work is broken into a series of individual units, or levels, and each contains characters, challenges, and an environment to explore. Games are usually set in a well-defined environment (such as an archipelago, a haunted house, or a resort town) and each level is a subsection of that environment (an island of the archipelago, a basement in the haunted house, or the stables in the resort town). Players typically work their way through the game level by level but are sometimes free to move in a nonsequential order. The challenges in each level become more intense and difficult as you advance through the game. At the final level, players will almost certainly come face to face with the boss monster and fight their final battle.

The hub and spoke is a common structural model used in children's games, educational works, and in interactive training projects for adults. It is a very simple and intuitive structure for people who may not be particularly computer savvy. In these works, the material is broken into a number of different modules, or independent units. Players start out from a central location (the hub) and can visit any module they choose (the spokes), in any order. Each module can have its own type of content, own look, and own type of interactive experience.

In addition to these basic structures, a number of structural techniques exist that help rein in branching storylines. These include the *cul-de-sac*, the *loop back*, and the *barrier*. The cul-de-sac, much like certain streets you will find in suburban neighborhoods, are areas off the main narrative path that users are free to explore but culminate in dead ends, forcing users back to the central path. In the loop back construct, users must return to an area of the work they have previously visited in order to complete some important task or retrieve an essential piece of information. With a barrier, users cannot move forward until they first succeed at performing a *gateway task*, which then unlocks the barrier.

Sometimes as a writer you will need to devise a previously unnamed structure to fit the type of story you want to create, and you realize it will be necessary to describe what you have in mind to your colleagues. I found myself in this situation when I

was scheduled to pitch a series of interactive stories to Disney Online. The stories I had in mind began with a linear sequence, offered a great deal of interactivity in the center, and then ended with another linear sequence. But how would I make this structural model clear to the people at Disney? After some intense personal brainstorming, I came up with a vivid label to give it: the *Python That Swallowed a Pig*. It fit perfectly. Pythons, like all snakes, are long narrow creatures, but when a python swallows a large animal such as a pig, its center section expands enormously to accommodate its meal. So, in this structural model, the users enter through the head (the linear opening of the story), can enjoy a great deal of interactivity in the center (where the pig is) and then exit through the linear passageway that concludes the story (the python's tail).

Despite the various structural models mentioned here, and many others that there is no room to describe, it is important to note that some ancient structural models can still be applied to New Media. For example, Aristotle's three-act structure can almost always be found in interactive narratives, though the acts are rarely in their customary places. The story may open with Act 3, for instance, and the users must work backwards to discover story beats that belong to Acts 1 and 2. Still, a careful study of a complex interactive story will generally uncover the three acts that Aristotle delineated.

The Hero's Journey is another ancient structure that can readily be found in New Media narratives, particularly in video games. Famed mythologist James Campbell described this story model in his work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, written in 1949. More recently, writer Christopher Vogler interpreted Campbell's work for today's readers and writers. The hero's journey, as Campbell discovered, was a universal feature of myths throughout the world, and is essentially a coming-of-age story. In the hero's journey, a young person sets out from home on a harrowing quest or mission. Along the way, this youth meets up with a series of characters who either help or hinder him, and he must deal with a succession of dangerous challenges. Finally, the youth reaches his destination, victorious. He emerges from his adventure no longer a youth but a mature adult. Just from this skeleton description, it is easy to see why the Hero's Journey would be an attractive model for video games and other interactive narratives. It offers a well-defined goal and a series of challenges, and can also be shaped to offer players a rich storyworld to explore. Writers who want work in New Media do themselves a service by becoming well versed in the hero's journey, since it is such a useful model to employ.

The Unique Characteristics of New Media Narratives

Although works of New Media contain many of the same elements as traditional stories (though with their own special twist), they also contain features not found in movies, stage plays, novels and older forms of storytelling. Writers in this arena need to take these unique characteristics into account right from the start, during the earli-

est development stage of their projects. As noted earlier, they include nonlinearity, the inclusion of gaming elements, the breaking of the fourth wall, and immersiveness. We have already taken a look at nonlinearity, where scenes do not follow each other in a strict sequential order.

Not only are most interactive works of New Media nonlinear, but in addition, a great many of these works contain gaming elements. These gaming elements are employed to help keep users motivated so they will stay glued to the piece. This is an important consideration, since nonlinearity results in stories where the plotline is not cohesive. Without a cohesive plot, you can no longer build a story that provides the audience with the riveting desire to find out what happens next. Gaming elements, however, do provide a strong incentive to stick with the work and complete it. They include the establishment of a clear and highly desirable goal, the concept of winning or losing, a system of rewards and penalties, and a built in sense of competition – either against a formidable adversary or against a series of exciting challenges.

Works vary in how heavily they utilize gaming elements, though almost inevitably they are game-like in one way or another. Video games, of course, are defined by the fact that they are games. But the gaming elements in other works can be more subtle and are game-like simply because they provide users with strong inducements to stay involved. Developers of New Media works often find it difficult to build an interactive work that is devoid of any gaming elements. It should be noted, however, that interactive works do exist that have strong storylines and yet have no elements of gaming. For example, *Uncompressed*, a work of interactive cinema (iCinema) by filmmaker Margi Szperling, is the nonlinear story of a shooting that features six sets of characters. But it is up to the user to tie all the scenes together in order to determine who shot whom and why.

One of the most intriguing narrative features New Media gives us is the ability to break the fourth wall. The fourth wall is a concept that comes to us from the theater world. It is the invisible boundary that separates the actors up on the stage from the audience below and prevents them from communicating with each other. In a sense, the fourth wall separates real life from fiction. With New Media, however, the fourth wall can vanish and the boundaries between real life and fiction can become blurred. In these new stories, we can and often do interact with fictional characters. We can "talk" with them via interactive dialogue options, and their responses can seem believably lifelike. They might also send us emails, phone us and send us text messages. We might even engage in IM (Instant Messaging) sessions with fictional characters. These exchanges can seem so authentic that we might not be certain whether we are communicating with a living breathing person or with a character who possesses a high degree of artificial intelligence. Furthermore, we can engage, via our avatars, in realistic battles with fictional monsters or become buddies with more pleasant characters.

The breaking of the fourth wall is one of the reasons that works of New Media can be so immersive. In other words, these stories pull us into a fictional world and give us the sense of being surrounded by it, to the point that our everyday lives and troubles

recede far into the distance. As a writer of New Media, you want to develop as immersive an experience for your audience as possible, because it is one of the major reasons people are drawn to these works.

Immersiveness can take two forms. In some cases, it is figurative, as when you are represented by an avatar of yourself on the screen. You aren't really in the storyworld, but you definitely feel as if you are. Your avatar can go on great adventures, make friends, fall in love, or, on the more dangerous side of the spectrum, go on hazardous missions and be wounded or even be killed. In a battle scene, you can feel as excited and terrified as if you were actually on a real battlefield, ducking real bullets.

In some works of New Media, the immersion is literal. You are actually surrounded by the story in real time and in a real place and actively participate in it. One such example is an attraction called *Team Possible* set in Disney's Epcot theme park in Florida. It's tied to Disney's *Kim Possible* animated TV series and lets you become a secret agent and go on an interactive adventure throughout the park to find villains who threaten to destroy the world. You receive clues and support from the TV show's fictional characters via a handheld digital device called a Kimmunicator, which looks a great deal like a mobile phone.

Thus this attraction is immersive, because you are actually running around in the physical world looking for clues embedded within it. It also breaks the fourth wall, in that characters from the TV show talk to you on the mobile device. It is also gamelike, in that you have a clear-cut goal, numerous challenges, and receive a reward if you succeed at finding the villain you are after. And furthermore, it is a work of transmedia storytelling, because it extends the story of *Kim Possible* through another type of experience. Thus, this single attraction incorporates a great many attributes of New Media storytelling.

The Must-Haves of the New Media Writer

What exactly does it take to succeed as a New Media writer? Contrary to the common assumption, you don't need to be a computer wiz and don't need to know how to write computer code. But you do need to be comfortable with digital technology and the various platforms used for New Media works. You also need to be willing to learn about new technologies and platforms as they come along, and understand how they could be harnessed to produce an engaging experience for the audience. Let's say, for example, you were charged with creating the *Team Possible* experience for Epcot. One of the first things you'd want to do is get your hands on the Kimmunicator and learn how to operate it so you would understand what kinds of interactive material you could write for it.

One of the greatest challenges of working in the New Media arena is the need to stay current. Technologies and platforms change at lightning speed and forms that were once popular can become obsolete or even go through a crash cycle virtually

overnight. For instance, when I began writing for New Media, the project I was working on was going to be released as a laser disc program. But midway through the project, that idea was scrapped, replaced by the decision to release it as a CD-ROM, which was the hot new technology of the day. Everyone on the team had to quickly familiarize themselves with CD-ROMs. We had to learn how much information these discs could store in terms of sound, text, animation and video, and understand how users could interact with the material we included and how they could link to related pieces of material. Only a few years later, CD-ROMs fell out of favor, largely replaced by DVDs. I've also been through the first boom period of the Internet and the devastating bust in the year 2000. More recently, I've had to educate myself about two major new trends: social media and mobile apps, and learn what kinds of appealing interactive works could be constructed utilizing these relative newcomers.

In addition to keeping up with new technology trends, it's necessary to stay current with innovative work being done in New Media. I subscribe to about a dozen electronic newsletters and listservs in order to keep up. My email mailbox is always crammed full, but that's how I learned about the clever *Team Possible* project. I also go to as many New Media conferences as I can fit into my schedule and budget, and belong to several local New Media organizations.

Two other important qualities are necessary to succeed in this field. First, you must welcome interactivity, and second, you need to possess a spirit of adventure. As noted above, not every writer can deal with the way interactivity impacts on the story experience, but one needs to embrace interactivity in order to enjoy this field and survive in it. Furthermore, New Media is constantly changing and evolving. You never know what might be coming around the corner, so you can forget about predictability in your writing life. You can only count on being surprised. If you find this idea stimulating rather than daunting, and are excited about the power of interactivity, then this might just be a wonderful field for you!

References and Further Reading

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How to Make a Pocket Watch:
The British Ph.D.
in Creative Writing

Simon Holloway

At the final oral defense of my Ph.D. thesis a member of my examination committee casually commented that it was clear I had used the occasion of writing a novel within academia to experiment, to create a difficult and unusual text, taking advantage of the opportunity for creative research. Immediately and unthinkingly I replied that no, that was not the case, that the novel was exactly as it would have been had it been composed in other circumstances. Yet is this true, I wonder now, after the event? Is it possible to be so certain, either then or now, that *The Words We Use Are Black and White* is the same novel as it would have been had it not formed part of my doctoral study?

To engage with the creative process while simultaneously researching that process, in an academic environment, leads to a reflexive series of dialogues. These dialogues then lead to analyses, to consequent and future actions, and to an informed and informing examination of the relationship of Creative Writing research to practice, and practice to research. This much I know. Or this much I know now. Or this much I think I know now. It is hard to say with any certainty, given the (r)evolution I have gone through during my time as a Ph.D. candidate.

It is worth noting here, however, that my experiences of writing while enrolled in doctoral study are individual to me. There may be many similarities to others' experiences, either in their pursuit of academic excellence or in their creative activities, but this is by no means intended to be a statement of collective happenings. Indeed, that is one of the benefits of practice-led research, in that it is individual to the researcher. We get out of our studies what we put in, and hopefully more, but we each bring

our own personal histories and research ambitions to a Ph.D. While this is also true of other academic disciplines, in the case of Creative Writing this extends beyond intentions or reasons behind doctoral study to the practice-led balancing of creative desires with critical engagement, to the realm of practice, and to the relevance, whether intended or noticed, to future actions. This difference is crucial, and informs everything we do.

Research in Creative Writing?

Creative Writing is an activity. Or, rather, it is a series of interconnecting activities, groups and sequences of action which combine together to form a whole. As an academic discipline, doctoral research in the United Kingdom is primarily focused on actions as they take place, on practice rather than reflection or review. Certainly post-textual analysis and remediation is part of that process, but it is only part of a whole. The prevailing British understanding of Creative Writing research appears to see it as being practice-led research. To me, both before my Ph.D. and after, that is unquestionably the case; the research is by and large led by the creative acts themselves, hence the term "practice-led." The writing comes first, and this awareness leads everything that Creative Writing researchers such as myself do. More than that, the writing *is* the research. At times this is a difficult concept for those not directly involved in practice-led research to grasp fully, and this distinction between "conventional" research and that carried out through practice-led means is so fundamental that it demands further clarification.

Let us suppose that you have an interest in pocket watches. In order to research pocket watches you might examine those already made, take them apart to inspect their workings, admire and analyze the craft of those who made them, and place them in the historical, sociocultural context in which they were made. This is what could be termed "conventional" research in humanities disciplines, including English: you begin with a research question, an area of potential study as precise as the representation of womanhood in Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, for example, or the influence of urbanization on French literature of the 1830s, or the Lutheran beliefs of Otto Eduard Leopold von Bismarck. You then conduct a literature review, state an argument, and begin writing: the subject dictates the content, in that you have a limited range of relevant information, based on reading, evaluation, and insight.

Compare this to an alternative method of gathering data about pocket watches: you make one yourself. It will probably not be as pretty to look at or work as well as those already made, yet by making one you gain a different set of data about the making of pocket watches, knowledge about their construction and creation which you could only have got through action. Not better or worse than examining others' work, but different. Additional. This is practice-led research, and the subject of that research is primarily the actions which form the as yet unmade creative work. The body of evidence available for the student's perusal, at the beginning of doctoral study, is thus

contained as much in (the memory of) previous (creative) activities as it is in the work of others, if not more so.

The methods of study which make up the majority of British Creative Writing Ph.D.s, then, focus not on the post-textual examination of others' work but on the intratextual work of the student. To provide a suitable definition here, it is simple enough to say that Creative Writing research is carried out through action. Yet this "simple" definition under-presents the work taking place: the actions of Creative Writing research can for example include creative and critical responses, revisions, reedits; other texts brought about as a result of those primary actions; other discussions, readings and studies which do not apparently seem connected to the primary actions. What occasionally puzzles those not connected to practice-led research is how these actions – and the many, many others which individuals combine to form their own particular program of research – connect and add to the wider body of knowledge, in order to fulfill the criteria of valid academic study.

One answer to this is the explication of research given by Professor Jeri Kroll, Program Coordinator of Creative Writing at Flinders University in Adelaide, South Australia: "research is about asking questions and allowing others to understand what established pathways researchers have followed to find answers or, indeed, what new methods, tools and entry points they have discovered to negotiate their way through unexplored terrain." This description not only fulfills the necessary academic criteria but also gives those in practice-led research a way to relate their work to the wider field. It allows for an explanation of how something so esoteric and private as an individual's creative process can speak to others: as researchers in Creative Writing, in action, we are exploring the tools with which to assess that action. By describing what we do and how we do it we give the chance for our "pathways" to be followed, for our "methods" to be considered, for our "unexplored terrain" to relate to that of others. And so, with only the experience of looking at pocket watches to guide us, we decide to make one for ourselves, to see what can be learned from the process.

Beginnings

It is likely that the reasons why individuals choose to do a Ph.D. in Creative Writing are as varied as the individuals themselves. It could be a career decision, either to improve one's skill as a writer or to aim for a job in academia, teaching Creative Writing: most lectureship openings in universities now require a doctorate as a standard qualification. Ph.D. study can also be used as an opportunity to develop or extend one's critical skills, the chance to learn and apply new methods of reasoning to the practice of creativity in some form, whether that is process-based, contextual, or a combination of the two.

What appears clear to me now, however, and seems understated in most application literature, is that in addition the student must bring passions of all kinds to his or

her studies: a Ph.D. lasts at least three years, and costs many thousands of pounds in fees, living expenses, and lost earnings. Added to this financial burden is the strain of committing to an academic exercise which can very easily take over one's entire existence. A Ph.D. is generally not something which can be picked up and put down at will. It will consume hours of mental endeavor, interdisciplinary reading, writing, rewriting, and anguish. An element of passion, and the commitment to devote much of one's life to it, seems an essential prerequisite. This is perhaps where Creative Writing research fares so well: since practice-led research is carried out through action, through the inception and composition of new creative objects, passion for the work is (or tends to be) present in abundance. As writers we need the time, mental space and incentive to write, and when we enroll in Ph.D. study we are offered all three. More than that, they are forced upon us whether we like it or not. This presents writers with a set of circumstances which also has the potential to be disruptive to our individual patterns of writing, given the expectations of progress required by supervisory meetings and deadlines, yet this is still to come. We arrive at the start of doctoral study with passion and excitement, looking forward to the experiences of practice-led research.

But "beginning" is a curious affair. Imagine: you have decided to do a Ph.D. in Creative Writing; you have applied to and been accepted by an institution; you have met your supervisor (the most important academic relationship you will have for the next three-plus years); you have been inducted, orientated and shown around, listened to health and safety talks and found the library; you have IT access; you may even have a study space in a shared office. Now what? You are a student, but of what, and how do you go about it? Even if you have worked your way through a university education, moving smoothly and successfully through undergraduate and Master's degrees, you now find yourself sitting at a desk with very little advice as to what to do next.

There are as many different solutions to this quandary as there are Creative Writing Ph.D. students. Some dive into their creative work, beginning the novel, short story collection, poetry collection, screenplay, digital fiction or other writing which will, they hope, make up a large portion of their thesis. Others attend research seminars, introductory classes, lectures by guest speakers, fill themselves with the new environment of activity which makes up academic departments and/or intellectual communities. Still others hide and read, consuming texts and tracts which they think will contribute to their critical analysis. Most do many of these things, and more besides. My personal experience was similar, and yet different: my supervisor instructed me to do nothing. Not advised, but instructed. Do nothing.

Nothing? But I am a doctoral student now. Surely I should be studying? Yes, and no. I was told to think, about everything, and nothing in particular. I do not know if my supervisor gives the same instructions to all students: I suspect this is the case, although each student naturally has different needs and is thus supervised as an individual. Yet this simple instruction, to do nothing but think, proved to be the catalyst for all the doctoral and postdoctoral research which followed.

The reasons why this apparent inactivity was essential are as clear to me now as they were alien to me at the time: Creative Writing research takes place in action, yes, but how is one to define that action? Precisely where does a creative act begin and end? Where once I had been a writer, happily scribbling away with no thoughts other than the text currently being written, in terms of aesthetics and the (potential) market, now I was a researcher, a trainee academic. In order to start analyzing the creative actions I was carrying out I first needed to be able to see them, to notice their existence. I had to look at my creativity and its relationship with the/my world in an entirely new way. Very quickly it became clear that not only did I know nothing, but that there was little in the way of guidance or instruction for me to go about learning what I needed to know: as practice-led Creative Writing researchers we are principally examining works which do not exist, which only come into existence through and because of that very research. The reference points I had, then, at the beginning of my Ph.D., were limited to my perception of my and others' previous creative acts, and if perception is all I had then how could I create the new knowledge which doctoral study demands?

Let it not be forgotten: a doctoral thesis is a particular and precise document. It results in an academic and professional qualification which shows that you have produced new knowledge worthy of admission to the highest reaches of Creative Writing research. We are not talking here about a creative text of some sort and an accompanying critical essay, as I have found to be the "traditional" view of a thesis, but to me should instead be aiming toward a unified examination of elements of creative process and/or production. What I had not done at the start of my studies, and which I was now forced to do by my supervisor, was to confront not the content of (my) creativity but the processes of composition, in an academic context. And it took over a year for me to realize that what was required of me was an intrinsically different approach to creativity, one which could regard, analyze and assess practice in new ways. My actions needed to be examined, their referents and consequences critically investigated, and their relationship to other acts, regardless of origin, authorship and form, thoroughly reflected upon.

The instruction to do nothing also made me revisit my creative plans: Creative Writing research is not limited to the actions of writing or the items produced. It extends backward and forward in time and is interdisciplinary in nature. Thus, among many other areas, my particular research included looking at architectural movements of the 1920s and 1930s, the context in which the legendary French musician Jacques Brel composed his work, and the design and construction of the CERN particle accelerator in Geneva. Had I begun writing my thesis the moment I became enrolled as a doctoral candidate I would have missed these essential references to creative research. More than that, I would not have known why these areas of study were so vital not only to my thesis, but more importantly, to my development as a Creative Writing researcher.

Beginnings: in truth my thesis began many years ago, long before I even considered Ph.D. study. The situations and circumstances of my sociocultural environment, my

education, my interpersonal relationships, and my academic and personal histories, among many other details, all combined to produce the person I was, with the ambitions and desires I had at that time. It could even be suggested that the physical and emotional location which I was in at the time caused the writing I produced, without any choices on my part. From my conscious perspective, however, the thesis began 14 months after I started my Ph.D., if one takes as its beginning the occasion when I put pen to paper. That the novel which I submitted as part of my thesis was a completely different project from the one I had planned is, as far as I can believe, due to the extended period of "doing nothing" which was forced upon me. For I was not doing nothing. Far from it. I was engaged in Ph.D. study. I went to research seminars, made notes on loose and losable sheets of paper, took part in the social activities which help to make up an academic community of writers, worked to pay the bills, and was a husband and father. All of these contributed to my nascent appearance as being a researcher in Creative Writing as well as a writer.

It has been suggested that the situations of academia affect us more than we recognize, and not always positively, as shall be considered later. But for me the slow realization that my work exists in relation to the processes and (sociocultural) circumstances of its creation, elicited by that instructed year only of thought, can be considered as the explicit commencement of my doctoral work. Creative Writing research is led by creative practice, but without that radical change in mental strategies and reasonings, the acceptance that critical understandings underpin and inform creative actions, intricate and insightful doctoral work cannot take place. This is the beginning.

Middles

> Always the pain, the chaos of composition. . . . He saw spaces, incomplete features, and tried to guess the rest. . . . But the language tricked him with its inconsistencies. He watched sentences deteriorate, powerless to make them right. The nature of things was to be elusive. Things slipped through his perceptions. He could not get a grip on the runaway world.
>
> Limits everywhere. In every direction he came up against his own incompleteness. Cramped, fumbling, deficient. He knew things. It wasn't that he didn't know. (DeLillo 211)

The act of writing creatively within the academy is a strange and magnificent one. Where once an author had autonomy, constructing texts with ignorance and bliss, now he or she struggles to place words, knowing that each one will be inspected meticulously by an examination panel looking for mistakes and inconsistencies, for critical awareness and exploration, and above all for excellence. For a doctoral candidate the production of new knowledge, creatively speaking, can be a slow, tormenting experience, where each sentence is inherently constructed under the influence of the university environment, as Nigel Krauth explains:

> The academic novel has some quirky features. You don't just write it, you enrol in it. You don't just live in a garret to produce it, you attend classes/workshops/progress meetings. You don't have a private, lingering, developing affair with it, you have a supervisor or a supervisory panel who butt in on the intimacy of your writing it. . . . Importantly also, you don't write it for yourself and (hopefully) the thousands of others who will read it, you write it for your supervisors initially, and then, your examiners. (10)

This constant self-reflection and creative analysis is only one possibility. There is also the chance that the author's creativity will flow as never before. The freedoms to write away from commercial market forces and demands, away from the time constraints of full-time employment, and (supposedly) free from the restrictions of previous writerly acts, can all contribute to a new approach to the creative process.

What is certain, though impossible to quantify accurately, is the insidious influence of academia on creative actions. In the UK a Creative Writing Ph.D. is predominately framed in the study of the individual student-writer's creative actions. Since as writers (and as human beings) we use as our reference points previous actions and experience, once enrolled in doctoral study these creative actions are undertaken in an academic framework. And this contextualizing of action, the ubiquitous presence of an impending Ph.D. thesis, does more than merely inform actions, it shapes them.

Let us suppose that you have spent your first year doing nothing other than thinking. You now sit to write the creative element of your thesis, secure in what you are doing given the time spent in preparation. Yet your change of mindset, the locating of your writing within academic concerns, also changes your approach to your creativity. We are shaped by our sociocultural positions, our histories, our relationships: by living in Mali, for example, individuals are going to be influenced in differing ways (even subconsciously) by that environment. It is highly likely that to read for an extended period only the poetry of Ted Hughes will lead to your own poetry reflecting that immersion. How can your creative activities thus not similarly be affected by the academic situation in which you now find yourself?

By way of illustration: I enrolled on my Ph.D. degree with a particular novel in mind for my creative work, a particular style of pocket watch I wanted to try to make. Over a year later, and without the funds to go on the research trip needed for that novel, I found myself at Heathrow airport with five hours to waste until my flight. I bought a cup of coffee and took out a notebook and pen. Within three paragraphs I had created a character who, for pleasure, would go to the airport in the middle of the night and do nothing over a cup of coffee.

This could be seen as an extreme instance, certainly, yet within days the text I began writing that night in Heathrow became a novel, *The Words We Use Are Black and White*, and I quickly realized that this text would be the creative element of my thesis. Adding to this realization was the knowledge that I would (and wanted to) incorporate the critical interests I had developed during my studies up to that point, so that I could explore the ideas raised both creatively and critically.

And those ideas themselves had equally been affected by the university environ-ment: as a Creative Writing researcher, in name at least, I was in a physical situation which stimulated and encouraged critical engagement in creative activities. The seminars and academic and social communities, the symposia and conferences, the undergraduate classes taking place around me, even the buildings themselves, built for the purpose of learning, all imbued me with this analytical outlook. Everything undertaken was done with the knowledge that I was studying for a doctorate and would, at some point, be writing 100,000 words to that end.

Consider, for example, the seemingly innocuous act of reading. Both as a student and as an individual human I went about reading on a daily basis, from consuming the creative work of others to reading financial news online. My critical reading, however, or that which could be obviously and naturally placed in that category, was defined for me: certain authors and critics were suggested to me, based on their rel-evance to my own critical thoughts, and thus I read texts by Barthes and Foucault, by Derrida and Baudrillard. These texts led me on to other postmodern critics, and back to Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Gadamer. Given the nature of my area of investi-gation, that of dialogics and reader-response theory, I spent a lot of time reading Bakhtin and his respondents.

Yet were these texts chosen purely by the needs of my doctoral study, or were there other forces at work? I was guided in my initial reading by my supervisor and others. My follow-on reading was influenced by the texts mentioned in these original texts, by those found in online searches, and by discussion. And I was led specifically by the holdings of my university library, both in availability and fashion. It not unrea-sonably contained only texts which were classed as sufficiently academic. Henri Bergson and Thomas Mann appeared to be "unfashionable," in that their work was barely referred to or stocked. Bataille and Lyotard were deemed irrelevant.

The interests of faculty in the department in which I happened to be studying led me directly to the game theory of Caillois and Huizinga, and another's late suggestion led me to the cognitive poetics of Peter Stockwell: had my colleagues' interests been in other areas of literary theory I would almost certainly have read other texts, and the influence of these works on my own critical and creative practice would have been other. Away from the realms of what might be termed traditional literary theory, I found *Creativity: Theory, History, Practice* by Rob Pope, texts by Mihaly Csikszent-mihalyi and David Bohm, among many others relating to creativity and its functions and practice. There are too many texts I could list which discussed theories of pro-cess and composition. Would I have discovered and read any of these texts were it not for the direction of others, and more importantly, for my status as a Creative Writing doctoral candidate and researcher, I wonder?

Reading is not limited to critical texts. Nor is it limited to documents, or indeed solid physical objects: one reads the expression in others' faces, reads the weather in the clouds, reads the condition of the road ahead. When it comes to creative work, especially one's own, Creative Writing students read in other ways and for other means:

> The primary task of a writing student is, obviously, *writing*. . . . [Reading] has a different purpose. The text writers read most of all is their own text, which isn't finished yet. They read it over and over again as they revise: constantly changing it in the hope of making it better. And when we read, *as writers*, the finished works of other writers, we read them as de facto instruction manuals for technique, style, structure and thematic possibility. (Harris 35, emphasis in the original)

This process (or part of a wider creative process) of examination and interpretation forms part of what can be termed "event analysis": the assessment and understanding of writerly actions as they take place, rather than as part of post-textual analysis:

> A writer will examine a text critically in order to look closely at the effects it might have on the reader, and at different ways the text may be read, but the motivation is different . . . writerly critics are concerned with making the text "better." They tend to start from the premise that, this would work better if . . . Each draft one writes, one acts as one's own critic with regard to whether the work satisfies or not and what changes might be made in order to make it satisfy. (McLoughlin 89)

To develop McLoughlin's thoughts further, it seems to me that the various forms and reasons for the reading actions of a doctoral student are influenced by the academic environment in which they take place, by the situations under which new texts are composed and/or evaluated. It is certainly true (retrospectively speaking) that in my case this change of approach to all texts both required and inspired changes in the actions carried out, at all stages of the thesis's preparation. That the resulting documents include work which is affected and altered by the conditions of its composition is hardly surprising. What is more unexpected, perhaps, is the change that this writing reciprocates in the writer, as a direct consequence of the experience of working in an academic setting. Once at the middle, you might realize that you are not the same person who began the study. As to who you might be at the end, that is another question entirely.

Endings

By the start of the third year of my Ph.D. I had completed two full drafts of the novel. As far as I was concerned, apart from checking for typographical errors, it was finished. Left therefore with a full creative text and some critical/analytical ideas, I wondered what to do next. There are no guidebooks for how to begin the (overtly) critical section of a practice-led thesis; a few chapters or journal articles detailing personal experiences, but no authoritative instruction on how to transform pages of thoughts collected over the preceding years into an accurate, intelligent, and above all "new" examination of critical thinking.

If Creative Writing research in the UK is mostly led by practice, and for me that practice was the production of a creative text in the shape of *The Words We Use Are*

Black and White, then that document now had to be used as a research tool. Note here that it was not only the text which mattered but also the mere fact of its existence: the production of the novel provided more data to be analyzed, more information as to the processes of composition, and this knowledge could – and should – be applied beyond my own practice and beyond the field of writing itself.

I had gained, then, a new pocket watch, a new body of evidence, but one which had been brought into being in a different way because this creative activity was positioned in academia: critical thought was present throughout the text's composition, at least in the background, because it has to be; the nature of doctoral study requires that creative actions are complemented by critical awareness, and an appreciation of this must surely influence that action. In many ways, both hidden and realized, one's creative process is altered by critical thought. The university environment is in effect designed for that very purpose. What I was faced with, particularly as my research interests were/are related to the processes and actions of creative composition, was to identify, analyze and respond to those changes, to address in critical terms the actions of my own creativity.

This is not an easy task. Yet I had certain notions as to the areas of investigation which the novel and the conjoined critical analysis addressed. In addition to my Bakhtinian, heteroglossial leanings I needed to examine my processes of composition in terms of event analysis, specifically the role played by the physical and sociocultural position of the text's composition and the amount to which micro-geographical changes might affect the text produced. This was very quickly getting far deeper into the complex negotiations of personal and critical theory than I could have imagined it would when I started Ph.D. study. Such, perhaps, are the effects of the university situation, what Paul Dawson describes as the "belief that Creative Writing can provide an educational environment which facilitates a mutually enriching combination of the creative and critical faculties, of literary theory and practice" (162). In undertaking a Ph.D. in Creative Writing in the UK there is an implied acceptance of this alteration of student thinking: to engage with the academy is to engage with its beliefs and practices, after all.

My doctoral study was designed (by me and others) to create a new researcher, creating new knowledge to add to the field. It was hardly surprising then that in the final year of my Ph.D. I found myself examining areas which I had not thought I would ever explore, and differently from the way I would, or could, have done it before. My doctoral research included precisely that: research. Certainly creative actions themselves form part of this research; to me, and I suspect to many others, practice-led research in the UK is principally concerned with the knowledge to be gained through action rather than result, through the production rather than the product. Yet without (critical) analysis of the data gained through this action the research is incomplete, or at best unexpressed.

Here again, however, the requirements of a research degree could be said to be limiting that very knowledge, imposing restrictions on what can and cannot be said, and how. As Krauth says (above), the texts a student writes, whether creative or criti-

cal, are written for a very small and specific audience. In a practical sense this means the student engaging in Csikszentmihalyi's tripartite systems model of creativity in miniature (*Creativity*): the gatekeepers to the field are three or four individuals, those experts who are able to grant a person admission to the domain, to bless him or her as one of their own. No matter how ambitious, experimental, critically and creatively engaged the student may be, without the acceptance of these individual judges the work is, effectively, worthless. It is all but impossible therefore to try to construct a coherent doctoral thesis without the conscious inspection of every sentence in this light. What do they want? Am I using the right kind of language? Am I making this clear?

The creative work is equally open to different modes of examination: although I can defend my uses of language, phrasing and voice as creative choices, any judgments of quality, often defined as "publishable," are made by one's examiners rather than by the market. This is an interesting and confusing paradox, for if a text needs to be publishable in order to be of doctoral standard then surely the market is the only legitimate judge? And the notion that a work's only quantifiable merit is being "of publishable standard" is itself contrary to university study, as Camilla Nelson explains:

> For academic purposes, it is perhaps unsurprising that the values of the marketplace are often at cross-purposes with the idea of literary production – let alone whatever might be said to constitute "research" in creative writing. Research inevitably suggests innovation, investigation, or experimentation (and may even be at odds with the concept of aesthetic success), and this inevitably makes a work less marketable.

My examination committee's written report on my thesis praised the work for its risk-taking, both critically and creatively. Yet the choices I made in regard to the critical element of my thesis were not based on conscious decisions to take risks, or even to style the prose analysis in one way or another: as a unified research project, the thesis was led by *The Words We Use Are Black and White*, a novel which uses language to explore the (lack of) ability of humans to communicate. Led by this practice, the work was arranged purely to allow me to express my critical ideas in what I saw as the most effective manner, for that is the nature of practice-led research. Words are used to convey information, and the form and structure of those words is as much a part of that information as the meanings or interpretations of the phrases used.

The difference was that in the final years of my study I was able to understand the reasons why these creative and/or critical choices were vital for me to be able to articulate the research effectively, and for my gatekeepers to allow me to pass into the field. That the stylistic and presentation decisions were made and confirmed at this late stage reflected my changed status: I did not need my supervisor's permission, for I was a Creative Writing researcher. I thought differently, approached the work of others differently, made connections and mediations which I could not have made earlier.

For the person who completes practice-led research in Creative Writing is not the same person who began it. As individual humans, undertaking the human actions of writing, both writers and researchers are subject to the vagaries of life: we have responsibilities and interests away from our writing, and our circumstances and experiences alter us in seemingly imperceptible ways every moment of our lives. It appears impractical to consider that the behavior and interpretive qualities of a writer remain constant throughout the composition of a text. Since the actions of writing, both creatively and critically, are themselves mutable, it is natural that the texts produced will reflect changes in a writer's perspective.

This assumed fluidity of a writer's disposition applies to any form of research, indeed to any activity, yet it can be amplified in doctoral study by the length of time that a Ph.D. takes to complete. Even at three years there are bound to be material changes in a student's outlook; part-time study, with the usual limit in the UK of seven years to completion, coupled with the external activities inferred through the phrase "part-time," gives more scope for this persistent mutability. When one adds the exacerbating effects of a university environment to this inherent evolution of a researcher's intellectual development it is easy to see how students can find themselves as strangers to their theses at the end of their studies, given the way that ideas and thoughts can deepen and expand.

In doctoral study in Creative Writing in the UK, as in that of other degrees below it, the actions which a student undertakes affect more than the immediate outcomes. Or, to put it more succinctly, the actions of research change that research, and the actions which proceed from it. From this cycle of perception, interpretation, translation, and re-mediation comes a text or texts. An entity is brought into being. Whether or not I wrote the novel I had always planned to write, as I claimed so abruptly in my final oral examination, is open to serious question. Yet after those hours of investigation and debate, and the few corrections required to my thesis, I was allowed entry to the field and officially classified as a Creative Writing Researcher. What I chose to do with the texts produced as a result of that classification was up to me.

Consequences

It is a strange feeling to realize that doctoral study in Creative Writing has been pursued in the UK for only around 20 years. Whether this provides a suitable historical viewpoint, or a ground base of experience, seems to me still to be decided. Yet at the time of writing a Ph.D. or its equivalent is now available at around 50 universities in the UK alone, meaning that at a conservative figure somewhere between 75 and 100 new researchers in Creative Writing are graduating each year. If Creative Writing in academia is still what D.G. Myers described as a creative-critical enterprise, whose goal was critical understanding "conducted from within the conditions of literary practice" (133), then researchers emerging from doctoral study should be well versed in creative-critical understanding. This could – and one would hope would – extend

to an acceptance of a creative-critical crossover, of the transmission and reception of modes of thought from one form to the other and back again. And that is if it is possible to find a precise delineation of one form to the other, or even wish to find one.

What is noticeable, however, and lamentable, is the scarcity of overtly or definably critical work published by these students. It seems that in completing their studies students are focusing almost entirely on creative outcomes, many of which are published, as if they are the products which carry the most significance. This is perhaps partly due to the reasons why students choose to do doctoral study in the first place: the element still persists that a Creative Writing Ph.D. is in some way purely vocational training, that it is undertaken in order to devote time and effort to improving and producing creative work. Their ambitions extend to creative practice rather than to taking part in academic discourse. Yet as Donna Lee Brien points out, "dissemination and publication outcomes are of premier importance not only in higher education institutional discourse around research outcomes and quality, but also in the professional practice of all writers in the academy."

I am not suggesting here that Ph.D. graduates are not thinking critically, nor would I wish to infer that all those who wish to pursue a career which includes critical analyses of creativity (within academia or outside of it) are inactive. There are journal articles, books and conference papers written by graduates of doctoral study. There is more evidence, albeit for the most part anecdotal, that many new researchers continue to investigate creative activity long after they have completed their Ph.D. study: much of this seems to go on under the surface of formal, published work, a kind of global critical mass scrutinizing the actions of the self and others, discussing, examining, interpreting. Though it would be advantageous to all if this work was formulated into research outcomes which could be disseminated, it is worth remembering that we are all writers, and as such could be said to have a predisposition to hoard and dissect, to use for our own creative ends.

As a writer, and a researcher, I believe myself to be as guilty of this as any other: I think I undertook a Ph.D. for professional reasons, ranging from (academic) career advancement to the development of my own creative practice, but since I am no longer the same person who embarked on that study this can be little more than (mis)educated speculation. I have written several journal articles and given conference papers, yet I am more interested, more intellectually invested, perhaps, in my creative work. The critical sections within my thesis are self-referential, concerning the processes by which *The Words We Use Are Black and White* came into being. It appears to be impractical to try to publish my thesis as a whole, given the publishing industry's apathy toward such projects, and though my thesis has spawned some articles I have been more concerned with the novel's publication than the critical analysis of its composition.

Yet I am a Creative Writing researcher. The actions which formed my thesis still present themselves as research topics. For it must be stated bluntly: a doctoral thesis is not the end of research, it is the beginning. Research involves connected acts of

process and metaprocess, of critique and metacritique, of pre-actions, actions and re-actions, all of which are reevaluated and remediated for future actions. That a creative document exists in some form at the conclusion of a Ph.D. does not mean that the work is completed, and neither does it mean that seeking publication is the only logical next step, for published Creative Writing research is ultimately not about a writer writing or even a writer writing about writing, but is instead a thinker writing about a writer thinking. Published or not, texts produced from the actions of doctoral study thus form reference points, moments of experience, learning, and play which will affect future work.

In this way research leads to more research, to more questions to consider, an inter-weaving cycle (should you wish to examine it) of creation and analysis which continues throughout each individual's writerly actions. As much as the plain fact of being alive colors us with the experiences we have, adding to the body of knowledge we bring to a text, by undertaking doctoral research much of that knowledge is more special-ized to the field of Creative Writing, and more empirical to our own creative actions. The changes to process brought about by creative activity in an academic setting inform all future actions with this critical awareness, the fluid stages of inspection, evaluation and reconsideration becoming innate pre- and complementary modes of composition in future actions.

It could be suggested that the greatest benefit to a writer in completing a Ph.D. in Creative Writing is not the development of a new researcher, publishing learned articles and books, but the knowledge gained through investigations of and through process, through the making of our own pocket watches. The Creative Writing research I have done since my Ph.D., and which I will do in the future, both creative and critical, is informed by this analytical insight. As a consequence the texts which follow *The Words We Use Are Black and White* directly form part of this conversational interplay. Let the dialogue continue.

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10
Creative Writing and the Other Arts

Harriet Edwards and Julia Lockheart

> When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experiences.

If there are shared roads between design writings and creative writing, then these words by T.S. Eliot pinpoint two crucial shared acts relevant to this chapter. One is the act of juxtaposing the disparate (the term "hybridic" being common in design), which gives rise to tension that is exciting, and second is the act of synthesis, whether unconscious or conscious.

The following emerges from a discussion between Harriet Edwards (HE) and Julia Lockheart (JL), who together with Maziar Raein and Christoph Raatz, formed the project team of Writing Purposefully in Art and Design (Writing-PAD, 2002–2006). After a brief mention of the project and its influence, we survey some of the kinds of expressive writings that have been disseminated through our network, pointing out how writing is conceived in relation to art and design (A&D) practice. We then turn to our respective research-based experiments within design and writing, taking a lead from what Graeme Harper refers to as "acts" and "actions" (*On Creative Writing*), borrowed from Bergson (*Creative Evolution*). We conclude with the nature and potential of writing that is emerging from such experimentation.

A Capacious Sphere of Writing

Creative writing, as in the latter part of the twentieth century, is nowadays stretched as a term. Beyond the familiar genres of poetry, novels, scripts, computer game

storytelling, there are newer moves emergent from site-based projects, such as in the underground, hospitals, laboratories, or museums, as well as performance readings in our festivals and haiku twitters. And in these cases, there is much blurring with A&D moves. There are already publications about the way that the web is producing e-writing (Landow's *Hypertext 3.0*) and the journal of the National Association of Writing in Education in the UK documents more forms as they spring up – while avoiding the words "creative writing" in its name.

Creative writing has been closely knit to A&D for over a century not just in classic tales with illustrations but in cartoons and film scripts, for example. At the moment, a number of terms are proliferating alongside "creative": "design writing," "art writing," "digital-" and "e-writing," as well as the very simple and open term "writings." We cannot do justice to all of these variations but can point to some of these new routes briefly.

Creative or expressive forms of writing are also visible in the growing professional dissemination of art and design students' own practices – in portfolios of work, websites, blogs, poetic works, in work statements, catalog guides, college journals, and more. These practices are varied and fluid, public and shared, although sometimes can be found in the more private contexts of individual dissertations.

In an attempt to hone in on some specific moves out of all this abundance, we turn to the formative writing project that has made its particular mark upon us.

The Writing-PAD Project and Network

Some background on the writing situation in A&D higher education may be useful here in communicating our position. After the report of the UK National Advisory Council on Art Education in 1960 (the Coldstream report), a written component emerged in art, and then in design courses. At first, there was great freedom to decide how "complementary studies" might manifest (Candlin) but with the gradual move of colleges and polytechnics to university status came a parallel academization of writing that was often taught by staff who were separate from the studio context and came from distinct traditions such as Humanities. David Hockney was one of those art students who famously rejected such practice and instead painted his own Royal College of Art certificate.

Duality Imposed

As Fiona Candlin describes, the duality persisted with the strong influence of poststructuralism and the 1990s phase of conceptual art in UK universities. She also describes the growing imposition of management and, with research degrees, increasing pressure to conform to academic writing culture that proved an awkward fit with design culture characterized by the tacit, experiential, and material. This background

perspective possibly resonates with the situation of creative writing, which sometimes sits alongside the more dominant critical theory body of an English department. A reversal of the primary and the secondary can appear in such cases.

Forty years after Coldstream, our project aim was to explore the mismatches between studio-based students (often involved in visual, haptic, intuitive, experiential, CAD and tacit practices) and a writing culture from Humanities, with its tradition deriving from argument, informed by critical texts. While this split is oversimplified, we were certainly aware of difficulties encountered by mature, dyslexic, and international students in A&D – the initial focus of our project. The case studies on the website (www.writing-pad.ac.uk) are the result of an exchange of practices between individuals from "Learning and Teaching," "Support," and studio-based programs to "Context" or "Cultural Studies" (UK terms).

A&D Knowing, Being, Making

Writing-PAD went beyond acculturation into academic writings through the integration of reading strategies for undergraduates, for example. It involved rethinking the purposes of studio writing, and promoting student examples that challenged and stretched conceptions of "academic" writings. As we explained in our Survey of Practices in 2005, A&D were "perfectly capable of exploring ideas and debates that reflect their knowledge and research" which occur throughout A&D practices but "not necessarily within traditional writing structures." Thus, John Wood had traced the craft and scholastic traditions of the West and highlighted distinctions in the nature of knowledge and what kinds of knowing were valid within design, namely, a more opportunistic, heuristic and generative tradition than a scholarly one of argument and proof.

Cheri Logan, in a longitudinal study of graphic design students with their tutors, adopted a term from Donald Schön (writing on reflective practitioners): that of the "practicum" to describe the "plunging in" of doing as the principal form of learning in this case, with its immersive nature and disregard for time-keeping. She talks of shared activities, the importance of the physical, the senses, the emotions, and the engagement of the whole person. It is this kind of situation that we had in mind when discussing design practice, and one that the dyslexic and writing practitioner Pat Francis recreates for her own workshops, bringing the studio atmosphere to writing. No doubt it is familiar to many creative writing practitioners engaged in workshops.

Jonathan Miles and Harriet Edwards ("Seeing and Making") discussed creative writing elements of postgraduate A&D dissertations (employed on the Royal College of Art intranet). We emphasized the potential of seeing, thinking and making across studio and writing culture, believing they could potentially form a continuum. The attention to the etymology of "theory" as a spectacle, watching theater attentively, from Greek culture and thought, allied knowing more directly to seeing. This percep-

tion liberates the notion of theory as a construct to be imposed or a framework that must be followed. It offers a view of "knowledges" that add visual perception to the scholarly knowledge of the academic tradition and the more intuitive tacit knowing of the craft tradition. Thus, much creative practice, in writing as in design, does depend a lot on observation – on seeing what has been overlooked. However, the postgraduate student examples were inevitably more complex than observational pieces, as will be explained.

Jonathan Miles's emphasis on student enquiry over a polished form or tick-boxing of academic conventions was reminiscent of early Writing-PAD discussions in which we appreciated the unfinished – writings that trailed off, could not be sustained, raised more questions than answers, but nevertheless, writing that had original starting points or ambitious trajectories. This recalled, in turn, Montaigne's invention of the "essay" from the French meaning of "attempt" with its free-ranging content – and length.

Creative Writings

All kinds of writing hybrids were recorded during the Writing-PAD project itself. It is important to stress that these did not necessarily come out of a specific movement or through a theoretical framework but often out of the play of the creative mind that synthesizes the disparate or that follows a chain of association in an intuitive manner. The following lists some of the main directions taken by creative writing as recorded by Writing-PAD. It is not categorical – only indicative of an infinite number of potential combinations, which are not exclusive to A&D practices but might overlap with other arts such as dance, performance, and communications.

1   *Identity*   There are many accounts of writings in Writing-PAD that develop from a sense of identity or explore it. Inherent in this is an embrace rather than a denial of subjectivity. For example, one undergraduate contributed her own experience as a dyslexic and then illuminated this further by introducing aboriginal culture in which the visual was the primary language. The writing pointed back to the primary of visual over verbal in this case. (Weaver)

2   *Object as resource*   In this practice, students were invited to contemplate an object in as many ways as they could in a kind of prolonged brainstorming. The objects' connections to memory, the social, the historical, the aesthetic and so on then became the axes around which research took place and writing was developed. (James and Bland)

3   *Project-based writing*   Students curated their own exhibitions and wrote an account of this in lieu of an argument-based dissertation, an account that allowed the visuals of the exhibition to illuminate the pages. (Roth)

4   *The performative*   A postgraduate student related her experience of a sadomaso-chistic club (the inspiration for her creative practice) in a performative manner.

Autobiographical detail was juxtaposed with critical commentary about the psychology of clothes, talk, and behavior, and the whole dissertation was structured as a play with acts and a finale. (Edwards, 2003, see Writing-PAD)

5   *Stretching structure*   The models possessed creative structures too, some mirroring the stretched-out and exploratory nature or chain of creative investigation in "panoramic" or "landscape" structures. The structures arose out of subject matter and a visual or metaphoric sensibility together with an inventive nature. This is in direct contrast to dissertations structured by argument, though such radical departures still incorporated preludes or introductions, and conclusions of a kind.

6   *The "verbal sketchbook"*   These were a mix of expressive and reflective accounts that grew from the studio convention of developing sketchbooks of ideas for creative practice (Orr, Blythman, 2002, see Writing-PAD). Diary-like extracts could include aspects of practice such as influences, processes and visits alongside the visual. Jenny Moon on reflective practice had some influence on this, as did Pat Francis, who has developed many ways into writing based on the creative and material aspects of studio practice specifically. Other precedents can be seen in the case study by Anne Lydiat about a fine art writing practice that saw all emerging from studio and within studio, tutored by fine art staff (with Susan Orr cited as original tutor trainer).

7   *Writing submerged in design*   Radical undergraduate design models saw writings removed from essay forms, A4 and rational argument, and instead designed onto boxes, containers, packaging, and posters. One example saw design shapes cutting into an actual book, again producing subversive, visual commentary on rational discourse. Maziar Raein, working with graphics students, encouraged student works such as the maps on Writing-PAD's Image and Writing Gallery in which the design saw the shape of city plans (Barcelona, Paris, London) and the writing content was based on research about those plans: verbal description held in place by supralinguistic architectures.

8   *The visual essay*   This saw the promotion of visual and verbal dialogue – arguably a synthesis of disparate "texts" with precedents perhaps going back to Berger's *Ways of Seeing*. George Marks set this up in Wolverhampton as an alternative to a conventional dissertation for his undergraduate graphics students to interpret freely.

The examples above call strongly on two elements: the experience and identity of individual creative practice students, and secondly, the visual sphere as a catalyst and inspiration for writings. Whether or not visual and verbal "texts" are seen as disparate remains for another article, but the intuitive or imaginative synthesizing of texts through a largely visual sensibility and creative practice is what many of these examples have in common. In these ways, they form a challenge to more orthodox academic writing based on rational logic led by secondary references.

Writing in Creative Practice, the Intellect Journal (2007–)

More diverse practices are explored through issues of the *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice*, of which several directions will now be signposted. The first route is one that revels in the older integration of text with visual in the comic style of the Edinburgh school (Pollard et al.2009): practice is replete and needs no further commentary. The second route is one closely linked to earlier Writing-PAD case studies in which educationalists in A&D seek to further question the relationship of practices of writing, critical thinking, and reflective or reflexive thinking with students' more visual practices. This extends to performance and the understanding of creative practices as research practices is increasingly articulated. The third is that of "art writing," sprung out of one part of the huge sphere that is fine art or the visual arts. This is very much bound up in subjective, intellectual responses to texts (visual and verbal, historical and contemporary). The responses are often performative and explore subjective position and relationship through a dialogue with critical theory as described in the work of Mary Anne Francis, who declares her fine art practice to be writing itself, "writing as an aesthetic form." The fourth direction is that of electronic practices and literature, the subject of volume 4, issue 3 of the journal (Mencia), showcasing and debating digital writings; new understandings of community (Rettberg talks usefully of "social ontology"); creativity and the multimodal, along with the purposes of such emergent art and culture. We acknowledge that these directions are important and cutting edge, and that our own contributions here merely signpost what is a burgeoning field.

Writing Experiments: Some Acts and Actions

The authors' Ph.D. research areas have emerged from working within the design spheres of our respective universities as well as from Writing-PAD. Experimentation has taken place in spaces outside the main curricula. We have enjoyed the freedom to explore, take risks and debate. And while interdisciplinary, the projects have concentrated more on design and applied arts contexts than fine art or performance art.

HE: The experiments I undertook came to be called Rhythms of Practice as I contemplated how the drawing, talking and writing around design practices brought up other kinds of affect and condition – the senses, the moods, the physical and material details, the kind of space, time – that were hard to separate from the drawing and writing. "Rhythms" too in the sense that experiments seemed representative in some ways of individual design practices with their disparate mixes, attempts at synthesis, the ups and downs and sensitivities of making.

JL: The experiment I describe is taken from near the start of my research and is also design specifically. It is connected with anticommodification and through ritual

acts and writings, enacts a transformation of the overconsumed objects that participants bring so that, by the end, they occupy another status and purpose.

Both research projects invited volunteer participants and attracted mainly M.A. and research students in contrast with the Writing-PAD initiative. As with Graeme Harper's perspective in *On Creative Writing*, we are looking at writing practice but also the environment – the acts and actions – around it of which writing forms only one part. That is to say, we share somewhat in Graeme Harper's problematizing of creative writing and his understanding, developed from Bergson, that it goes beyond how to develop creative texts to the "acts" and "actions" of a more educationally and philosophically informed understanding of such activity. This perspective is not revolutionary and anyone engaged in creative writing workshops will understand the complexity that we indicate here.

We now share insights on the page through a number of interesting matters that emerged through experiments. We touch on the game element, the collaborative and the role of tutor, the tools, drawing, fresh angles, the surprise elements and awkwardness, discipline and silence, pleasure, time, the "primary," and finally, the place and nature of writings. Sometimes we will both comment, sometimes we take turns.

The game element

JL: The experiment was characterized by secrecy. The objects that participants brought were hidden and passed around so that no one else could see. The ritual also involved working in specific stages, writing down responses to objects, passing on, asking questions, passing on, working out in writings. So the workshop was a series of openings and closures. Getting everyone to get down and think together and then opening it up and thinking together. Eventually, the pieces of writing were returned to respective object owners.

The collaborative

JL: For me personally, I see writing at some point through process, with someone else. Some describe "cowriting" as even having an editor but what I am trying to achieve is more than that input: it is a team to put their minds together on the process of writing and that is what my tools are working toward. However, I don't think it is going to get them necessarily to a finished piece of work.

HE: There was a kind of collective passing on in my own case from a previous series of interviews about individual design practices. These were then introduced thematically and by myself in very simple anecdotal ways before participants were asked to respond with "whatever came up" in drawing of their own practice. The rhythm meant that this work of drawing, later writing, was mostly solitary,

while the feedback between stages invited communication across the whole group.

Designing tools

JL: So, it was 16 people, it was four people at four tables. From 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The tools included an opening tool (the hidden object) and a bringing together tool (the final exposure and discussion of the object). I would also call the guided visualization a tool, using a story from Ovid about a tower with lots of openings in it and no closable doors or windows so that words were coming into and flowing out of the tower.

HE: The "tools" were drawing mainly, through a whole mix of materials and then incidentally, as participants employed found objects, corners, walls, and folds. It is hard to use the word "tool" for drawing as it is so much more too: visualization, sketching, modeling, ideation, finished work. My choice of drawing came out of various quests. One was a means of creating a "real" design experiment rather than relying on second-hand accounts; another was a search for a means of immersing myself as well as students in the world of designing, with antecedents here from ethnography and notions of participant-observer. In some experiments (mainly those with undergraduates) we employed what might be considered "tools" in design but which were possibilities for writing – recipe forms, haiku forms, different kinds of maps, and so on.

Drawing and spontaneity

HE: Drawing seems immediate and raw, and sometimes, the faster the better. I am focusing here on ideational drawing or sketching – that sense of the lines coming fast onto the surface, just as we say that words come to us sometimes. I interpret the directness and speed of drawing, from either memory or just an out-of-the-blue sense, as the subconscious springing up, in line with Jane Graves. This is a kind of dodging of linear steps, drawing's potency going with our lack of conscious control over it. This instantaneous behavior is of course well known, and documented not only by creative writers and musicians but also scientists. My point is that it really is inimical to a methodical, linear, procedural, "rigorous" practice of academic writing.

Fresh angles and the question of the new

HE: As with the employment of drawing and the construction of the experiments, I cannot vouch for the originality of what occurred. But one of the reasons why

experiments were viewed positively is that they were out of the ordinary – the ordinary space of work, the normal group of peers, the preferential way/s of making. And I think that the "new" rather than the "original" works like a hook, crucial for fruitful practice. The experiments were reminders of drawing potency for some and welcome explorations for others. And while I was concerned that the themes (intuition, inspiration, mistakes, observation) would appear old hat, in combination with drawing, they seemed to allow new glimpses, re-views and occasionally, revelations. The experiments showed students how they could enter a writing practice from new angles. None of us were sure about what would come up, in other words, despite the lead-in of a specific theme, the activities were exploratory and open-ended. This meant sometimes that the theme itself would be "dodged" as another more pressing matter emerged through the drawing.

The surprise elements – and awkwardness

JL: There is something about awkwardness, I think, that I have been made aware of by Hannah Jones, a colleague at Goldsmiths, University of London. Awkwardness does inspire creativity. If you make everything too smooth, it does not seem to work, although I cannot explain that at the moment.

HE: That connects to my reading of Iain McGilchrist and the right and left brain. If you are a creative person, you want what is new, which is not the same as original. So, the awkwardness, the difficulty in being lost, confused, it puts you in a new place, it gives you a new eye. Awkwardness in the experiments was apparent when starting with any new group. There was newness and oddness, no right or wrong, freedom to take things in any way, and doubt over the ultimate purpose that I shared myself. Outcomes were not known in advance. There was awkwardness in my own case when I hit the wrong note or overexplained at the start. There was awkwardness when a drawing output did not work, when there was a block, and when there seemed nothing to say. There was especial awkwardness in sharing the actual writing as opposed to recounting the thought and expression residing there. However, the A&D training of being open, trying out, taking a breath and getting on with things proved vigorous. There were many examples of being able to tolerate difficulty and not knowing.

Time

JL: The experiment was like a teaching schedule, I suppose, of timings, like "this will take five minutes." And everyone said to me in feedback that it was the most time-aware workshop they'd ever been to in that it started and ended at particular points and it was on time. And everything ran on time, very smoothly.

Silence

JL: The whole of the first part was in silence from 10 a.m. until lunchtime: "You might feel pleased about this or you might not . . . now you can start to discuss the words." And participants reflected on that whole silence thing and said that they liked it. I didn't want people to talk about their experiences – I didn't want it to go into the ether – I wanted it to go on paper. And for me personally, if I talk, I will forget what I was thinking. It is as though I have a compulsion to explain something and once it's formed into words, I've forgotten it. And that is hard because I don't take notes a lot and I should write things down and I think it is because I like – I like – disparate – I like debate. That's why I like collaboration.

HE: That is what Jane Graves says about creative practitioners, about forgetting: if you are a creative practitioner you have to forget in order to make. I completely understand it and that is why I don't like the monopoly of semiotics and suchlike.

Discipline

HE: What is interesting for me is how the silence goes with concentration and discipline. "Discipline" seems such an outdated word with negative connotations but there is something to be said for confinement in a place or at a time for the exercising of creative writing and possibly drawing or other creative practice too. We need to continually impose limits in order to ingest, digest and generate. For myself, with the limitless around me, not to mention an array of distractions, I need to cut myself off. This sticking does at times feel like real punishment, though particularly so with words. So I see the collaborative space as one part of a rhythm that involves being quiet within the space, in order to hear ourselves think. The stretch of time to think, concentrate and exercise without interruption becomes precious, and in the experiments the engaging silence was palpable, like harmony.

Pleasure

HE: Pleasure is something I associate much more with drawing, perhaps to do with expansiveness and freedom to roam. It is not bound up with rules as in a linear placing of words, each cluster in agreement with another, on a page, left to right, line by line. Nobody can tell me that the color I have chosen is categorically "wrong" or in the "wrong" place. This sense of freedom of expression goes along with a distinct pattern of progress. In drawing figuratively, I can appreciate that practice makes perfect – the eye, the hand, the mind are trained, but in the creative drawing and writing, the spontaneity was fruitful.

Rhythms, the physical, the material

JL: And the first exercise was a dancing thing; it was about trying to get the whole body into a rhythm. Why I did this is terribly intuitive. It is because I often find myself using the rhythm of walking to sort out difficulties. So I thought, "right, I'm going to try with a walking tool." If writing is problematic for those I work with, I thought I would use a rhythm they had mastered – walking – to form a positive engagement throughout the body.

HE: The kinetic aspect of the experiments was noticeable in my own case too. The space of the drawing studio invited lounging, lying, standing, and work on floors, walls, and in sketchbooks, as well as moving round to see each others' work. The movement went with ease and relaxation. The drawings, exchanges and writings were the "rhythms of practice." But the rhythms were more than movement. They were the moves from input to sketch, from sketch to spoken exchange and from exchange to writing. They also described the ups and downs of the designing revealed through drawing, that is, the inspirations, the frustrations, the flows, the blocks, the practical concerns, mistakes (including my own of course), and so on. The overall picture of designing in these ways became very rich – not romantic but full.

The primary

HE: I suggest that the creative writing and the drawing of design practices concur in the need for some sort of tripwire, or inspiration to spark an idea, a sketch, or first mark on the page. This is in no way to negate the hard and sometimes humdrum nature of either practice. It is rather to indicate something "primary." There are those in design who work with a more visionary type of imagination, and on the other hand, those who work with historical or theoretical, philosophical references. In the main, secondary sources such as published texts of mainstream academic contexts were not brought up, drawn or discussed in experiments. Sources were primary, raw, from our senses, surroundings, and experiences; that is to say, they were less mediated, abstract or codified sources. It is true that the experiments were set up to privilege these kinds of "primary." My intention had been to see how writing that has sprung from such designing sources could manifest without denying that a whole host of other kinds of writing are practiced in design.

The speculative and the established

JL: When participants say, "you've shown us another way to write," I am surprised. I do not know what to do with the leads at the moment. I'm skeptical but I'm not critical; it's partly because there is a creative output and things work at an

unconscious level that I have not yet unpicked. Although I can envisage a time when I look back at the experiments and see some kind of narrative in it. It is a kind of reflective practice. I am also "re-languaging." That is, I am trying to offer or co-create neologisms for the new design situations that we find ourselves in. Whether these endure for one particular design workshop or grow beyond that into a wiki, into twitter, into networking and group parlance is not predictable in advance.

Stuff, toward phenomenology

HE: By the end of my Ph.D. I was really interested in phenomenology. The presence of objects, the importance of objects, the importance of the world around us, and this is where influence and inspiration come from because this is what we have! This is the real material. But actually, although you say you went into language and although the objects disappeared, objects were primary because without them, there would have been no experiment.

The surprise element and the nature of words

JL: Objects and writing went through transformations that were not anticipated in advance. The words were taken into a variety of shapes such as huge cut-ups placed over the wall, or speech bubbles. It seems that the content also was very symbolic, at the level of metaphor or concept rather than a story told in sentences and sections with a plot.

HE: I found one contrast in experimental writing was this preference for what I called nuggets, and with that went a conspicuous lack of adjectives and adverbs! The meaning, in other words, was conveyed simply, almost metaphorically, beyond a very detailed or descriptive writing. Perhaps this was to do with the idea of holding the symbolic as a resource for further designing intent rather than attempting to evoke a world in words. In general though, the drawing aspect of the experiments I undertook seemed to clarify participants' practice or think-ing and contribute insights, sometimes rendering writing redundant or register-ing it as a by-product.

Some transformations

JL: When we got all the objects out in a circle at the end, we marveled at the way in which we could see other possibilities for the objects that they had brought in as something they didn't like very much, as examples of overconsumption.

HE: Overall, the effects were mixed. I think that for many the transformation in the experiments I facilitated came from the concentration of drawing, the familiar practice, and sometimes it came from chatting around the drawing and occasion-ally from writing too.

Limits and strengths

JL: One person in the metadesign group who likes to write said that the tools were too important and the people got lost: so someone who had control over writing did not enjoy that control taken away, though the group as a whole did. One said: "I have found a new way of writing from doing this. I could not do this before."

HE: In a sense, I thought I was intervening in practices that were already dynamic and just suggesting a new angle or way of looking at them. Such experiments have to remain on the outer fringe of individuals' practice: they are potent because they are infrequent; in other words, they work like an additional tool but are no substitute for mature practices. Maybe there was a reminder in there too about the strength of drawing.

The place of words

HE: What was apparent was how the effects of drawing made writing flow more, and gave rise to new and interesting pieces, carried out within a very short timespan. What came up were not so much narrative in nature and more like cartoon captions; metaphoric nuggets; the spoken voice, or writing taken into drawing, in the corners and at the folds; words that conveyed actions and movement. Some pieces were explanatory (more toward reflective), while others sought to nail the insights that had come up about individual practices.

JL: One big distinction is the fact that the output of design practice is design, even when at a radical edge such as metadesign that seeks new models and less dependence on material objects for its rationale. But the "languaging" (Maturana) element is significant. In Spanish, the lengua – the tongue – is said to be the only muscle not attached to a bone; thus it is free to explore and play with words. In Spanish the same word, lengua – language – is a verb, and when translated directly into English allows us "to language," what we might call word play, and also suggests the gerund, languaging, or what we might call designing language. Within design the products of languaging may be restricted to one group or may "seed" themselves in the wider world. I describe this process of play as fertile, light, and mercurial. The creation of neologisms through collaborative languaging allows us the possibility to clarify and explain things that are happening now in the world – new language for new purposes.

Conclusions

We have described some recent contexts of writing practice in A&D, in the first half via the Writing-PAD project, and in the second half via our two research projects. We have touched on some central dilemmas of creative practice writing in the face

of academic contexts and pressures, and have also described the challenges to such contexts, for instance in how studio-minds have employed writing as a part of their own creative practice research, bringing fresh ideas, structures and integrative or multimodal forms to bear. In doing so, we have suggested some of the similarity with and difference from creative writing outside A&D. We have additionally signaled a coincidence with acts and actions as described by Graeme Harper and emphasized the point that the activities of creative writing practices might not straightforwardly connect to actual writing outcomes. We have embraced experiment and the possibility of not being able to anticipate outcomes, and we have done so in the privileged space still discoverable in academia and outside the commercial sphere. With the experimental come surprise, the new, and the awkward – for which we are glad.

In both kinds of experiment, writing has been distinct from the imaginative of a literary imagination, as well as distinct from the scholarly. It has been based more on the primary and the experiential. We anticipate that this is similar in some creative writing workshops. An exact definition of "creative writing" is elusive but in HE's case, poetic and episodic writing was certainly produced in relation to practice, with drawing as a central fulcrum, though interestingly, with drawing (and speaking) sometimes erasing writing. In JL's case, play with words produced lists, circles, questions, story responses, and the activation of languaging.

We have spoken of an interplay of individual and collaborative enterprise; a strong affective sense (the motivational, the inspirational, the surprising), and the difficulty of separating the making of words on pages from other making activities taking place that can involve visualization, space, speaking, movement, and the ownership by a group formed at one time in one place. As Graeme Harper says, the writing outcome is not necessarily the half of what is going on.

Our tentative account forms small stabs in the dark. We seem to be in an age where there is very much counting, accountability, rationalizing, validating, justifying, and so forth. We are aware that our experiments seem tame compared to many that took place in the 1960s, as the calculating seems to have taken over. If we have some moments of surprise, some of awkwardness, and if we cannot predict exactly will emerge, we are a little gratified, and still puzzling away, still shaping with words. On the other hand, in art and design, as no doubt elsewhere, we are very much aware of the phenomenal effect of the digital revolution of the last decade and anticipate that the time of flux will endure further, with many kinds of creative practices, including those of writing, emerging in conjunction with the more established – that is certainly a further chapter.

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Part II
The Creative Writer's Profession

11

Agents, Publishers, and Booksellers: A Historical Perspective

John Feather

Writers write to be read. Whatever their other motives – personal, social, cultural, financial – that is surely a common factor, an immoveable and irreducible baseline. But to be read outside their immediate circle of personal acquaintances, writers must seek channels through which they can reach a wider audience. Those channels involve one or more intermediaries who are engaged in the distribution of the work and in its reproduction and sale. At most times and in most places, this process has been at least partly commercial, regardless of the motivation or even the desires of the writer. While commerce cannot make writers creative, it can most certainly inhibit creativity, and while it cannot create an audience, it can prevent a work from reaching an audience which would otherwise exist. The intermediary process should not, however, be seen as negative. Indeed, it is the critical mechanism through which authors and readers can be brought together, and at the individual level – where author interacts with intermediary – it can in itself be an essential part of the creative process.

The classic model of this process assumes a more or less linear progression from author to reader (Figure 11.1). But this is both superficial and specific to a particular economic and social model. Writers can communicate directly with their readers, and even when they use intermediaries, those who undertake that function need not be the commercial actors implied by the terminology used in Figure 11.1. Perhaps the most obvious alternative scenario is that the author is both "publisher" and "bookseller," a self-publisher who in the early twenty-first century is using the world wide web as a distribution mechanism and may not take any payment from his or her (literary) consumers.
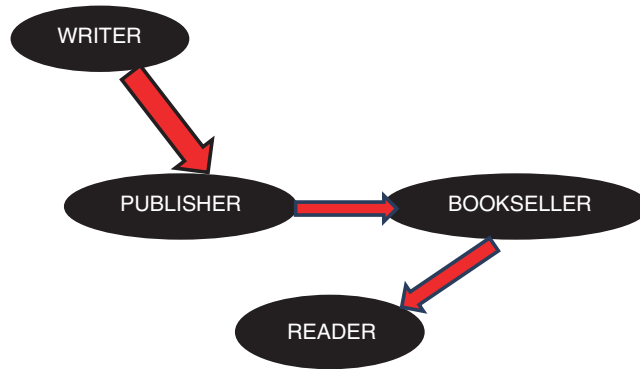
Figure 11.1

In fact, the link from writer to reader never quite matches this simple model. A recent study of the publishing industry by a social scientist describes a model similar to this as being of the "book supply chain," but even in a relatively straightforward version he adds an agent between the author and the publisher, includes the printer as a functionary who enables the publisher to create a product, and describes the bookseller as a "distributor." The distributor then becomes the head of a series of parallel chains which take books through wholesalers and library suppliers to retailers, institutions such as schools and libraries, and ultimately to buyers and readers (Thompson 14–16). A different perspective on the same chain is then developed by looking at the accumulation of added value at each stage of the process from "content creation" to the acquisition of the product by or for the end-user (Thompson 16–19). Even this does not fully express the complexity of the contemporary publishing industry, with its diverse channels of communication, many of which no longer involve the use of print-on-paper to produce products for sale.

There is, however, a more fundamental flaw in this approach to describing the publishing industry. While linear models can trace the progress of a work from the author's brain to the reader's hand and eye, they do not adequately describe the part played by the publisher. The "value chain" contains at least eight distinct functions which are performed wholly or partly by the "publisher." These include the acquisition, development, and quality control of content, making arrangements for design, production, and proofreading, and sales, marketing, warehousing, and distribution. A better way to describe the publishing function in conceptual terms is to think of the publisher (meaning the publishing *company* rather than any individual within it) as the manager of a complex series of interlocking processes; moreover, it is the publishing company which provides the financial investment which makes all these processes possible, not least by employing those who carry out or commission them. We should look at the publisher as the provider of capital and the organizer

for the processes involved in the production and sale of books (Feather, *Communicating Knowledge*, 98–129).

Understanding how we have arrived at this position involves more than a knowledge of the delivery systems – both technical and commercial – which have developed in the last 20 years. It requires an understanding of the historical evolution of the industry and of the roles of some of the key players in it. The purpose of this chapter is to explore that history, particularly in relation to the roles of the agent, the publisher, and the bookseller. We shall begin, however, with a brief account of the industry itself and how it has evolved in the last 150 years.

The Evolution of the Publishing Industry

The structure of the contemporary publishing industry is essentially a product of the nineteenth century, although it had developed from much older activities. The business history of publishing is largely one of evolution from craft-based to industrial systems of production and from small family businesses to large corporations. Although these developments have not been entirely synchronous, they are intimately linked, and neither can be fully understood in isolation.

The core functions of publishing are central to a commercial book trade, regardless of the format of the product or the techniques by which it is produced. When a commercial book trade began to develop in the ancient Mediterranean and when it was revived in medieval Europe there were actors who provided the capital for the writing of manuscripts and employed some of the scribes who copied books. When printing displaced writing as the normal medium of commercial production – a process essentially complete in Western Europe by the end of the fifteenth century – ownership of equipment and a command of the skill to use it were added to the mix. At first, printer, "publisher," and bookseller were often the same person, but there was a relatively swift development of specialization. The need to produce a comparatively large number of copies of a book – the inexorable logic of printing – meant that few could be sold in the location where they were produced. The development of complex networks of distribution introduced new players into the trade – merchants, wholesalers, carriers, and providers of capital – and at the same time the printers needed to develop their own supply chains to acquire paper, ink, and type. The trade became so complex that specialization was inevitable. In England, by the end of the sixteenth century, printing and bookselling were becoming distinct, and the printers were, as they have remained, normally the paid agents of the publishers.

The word "publisher" however was not used. Those who performed the publishing function called themselves "booksellers" and were typically retailers, wholesalers and distributors as well as publishers. In practice, from the late seventeenth century onward, publishing in London and other major centers of European book production came to be concentrated in the hands of a relatively small number of individuals and their businesses. This change was most radical in England, with its relatively light

approach to censorship from the end of the seventeenth century onward. A key factor, however, was the development of copyright law and associated customs and practices in the trade, but it was reinforced by the development of skills and experience, the evolution of largely hidden networks and cartels of successful practitioners competing with each other but protecting their collective oligopoly, and the accumulation of capital (both as money and as intellectual property) which enabled businesses to stabilize and to pass from one generation to the next.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the distinction between publishing (not yet so-called) and bookselling had become obvious. Even within the bookselling branch of the trade there was a growing variety of wholesalers, distributors and retailers, the latter ranging from metropolitan emporia to small provincial shops. In Britain, these changes took place between about 1780 and about 1830; in the infant United States something very similar happened a little later and for different reasons, opening the way to both conflict and cooperation between British and American publishers in the future (Feather, *History*, 71–96; Green; Raven 294–319; Weedon 59–110).

As the new relationships between the various players in the trade were developing, there were broadly contemporary developments in the technology of book production and the materials used for books. By the end of the eighteenth century, the demand for paper in Europe was so great that traditional methods of making it by hand were no longer adequate, and the traditional materials which were used for papermaking were in short supply (Darnton 185–196). A papermaking machine was invented in the 1790s and was commercially promoted in the first decade of the new century. The first working machine was installed in 1807, and thereafter machine-made paper quickly became the norm for all commercial purposes. Printing also underwent a series of important developments. The traditional hand-press, made of wood and operated by two men who were able to print about 250 sheets an hour was displaced first by iron presses which could use larger sheets of paper and be worked slightly more quickly, and then by steam-powered presses whose size and speed of operation increased continuously as new designs were put on to the market. The first steam-powered press was patented in 1810 and installed by *The Times* in London in 1814 (Clair 360–367); indeed most of the technical advances in printing throughout the nineteenth century were driven by the needs of the newspaper industry for high-speed presses capable of producing long print-runs. By the 1830s many book printers on both sides of the Atlantic were also employing steam-powered presses and they became the norm until the steam engines were displaced first by gas and then by electricity later in the century.

Two other essential elements of book production proved more difficult to mechanize. Typesetting presented problems which defeated the ingenuity of inventors until relatively late in the century. Many weird and wonderful machines were tried experimentally (largely in the British and American newspaper industries), but it was not until the 1880s that workable systems were finally devised (Clair 376–383). Even at the end of the century, there was a good deal of hand-setting in book production. The problem had however been somewhat eased by the widespread adoption of stereotyp-

ing from about 1805 onwards. While this did not save time on the typesetting, it did make reprinting relatively easy and also made it possible to have long print-runs with a more or less uniform quality of reproduction. In one sphere, however, there was little change in technique: the binding of books. This remained an essentially hand-craft process, albeit carried out on a large scale in a factory-like environment, until well into the twentieth century. What did change was that cloth and paper-covered card replaced leather as the normal cover material for bindings. The covers themselves began to be decorated – sometimes by embossing, sometimes by printing, and in both cases often using color – and dust jackets were gradually introduced by some publishers. By the middle of the century, some publishers were using the external appearance of their books as tools for marketing and advertising, a practice which persisted throughout the twentieth century and beyond.

The cumulative effect of these developments was transformative (Raven 320–350; St Clair 177–209). First, the price of books fell in real terms. After some sharp rises at the beginning of the century, there was a steady cheapening of books from the 1830s onward as the innovations in papermaking and printing began to have a significant impact. Secondly, the printers – upon whom the publishers were dependent for the production of their books – were operating in an industrial environment in which they had to employ a large number of skilled workers; this was particularly true in typesetting, where the trade unions became powerful players at an early date. Thirdly, there was a significant increase in the number of books produced both in terms of titles and of print-runs, and a diversification of the forms of print as newspapers and magazines benefited (perhaps even more than book publishing) from the effects of technological change. Fourthly, there was significant growth in demand for all forms of print, including books, partly as a result of rapid population growth but also because of increased rates of literacy and developments in educational and library provision which were both cause and consequence of that increase. The publishing industry in the nineteenth century was underpinned by propitious economic, social and political circumstances unlike anything it had ever previously experienced.

It is against this background that we shall consider in more detail the evolution of three key aspects of the industry: its structure and business models; relationships between authors and publishers; and the development of the retail book trade.

The Business of Publishing

The emergence of publishing as a separate branch of the book trade was complete by about 1830 in Britain and the United States. Over the previous 50 years, one or two existing firms, of which the most notable was the already venerable Longmans, had transformed themselves from eighteenth-century "booksellers" engaged in retailing, wholesaling and distribution as well as in producing new titles and new editions, to recognizably modern publishers whose business consisted almost entirely of the latter activity. A powerful indicator of change is the increasing number of people who came

into the trade as publishers; the first was John Murray, but he had many successors. By the middle decades of the nineteenth century, publishing was a recognizable and distinctive business (Raven 320–350).

Some of those who founded publishing houses had previous experience in the book trade, but others did not. The Macmillan brothers, for example, who became publishers in the 1840s, had previously owned a bookshop in Cambridge, but they moved to London specifically to become publishers, abandoning their retail business altogether. Other mid-century arrivals on the scene – John Cassell, George Smith, and George Routledge to take but three examples – came into the trade to be publishers. Their motives were very varied. Cassell was ideologically driven – he saw publishing as an extension of his work in promoting the temperance movement. But others were driven by the desire to create or exploit a market. Routledge, for example, saw a whole new market in the travelers on the still developing railway network; his *Railway Library* was one of the first to be aimed explicitly at this new branch of the trade. Smith was a businessman; he inherited a retail stationery business which sold a few books, but his own firm was a literary publisher of novels and magazines, and his career reached its climax with the initiation of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Some publishers were genuinely motivated by wishing to serve literature and authors; John Lane would certainly have made such a claim, for which the evidence is *The Yellow Book* and his support for the circle of writers, including Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley, associated with it. But there were always publishers whose business was the making of money by the exploitation of the new mass markets created by new levels of prosperity and literacy (Feather, *History*, 103–107).

Historically, publishing had been a family affair, and so to some extent it remained. A typical preindustrial book trade business consisted of the members of a nuclear family unit, perhaps with a few employees or apprentices. Women – mainly wives and widows – were often part of the retail side of the business or (as employees rather than principals) were engaged in some parts of the bookbinding process. The moment at which there was a shift from a family business to the employment of labor was an important point in the development of a firm, and the general move in that direction is one of the markers of modernity in the trade from the second third of the nineteenth century onward. Publishers became employers of labor, including clerks who made it possible to operate and manage the business, as well as more specialized "publishing" employees engaged in editing and proofreading.

During the nineteenth century, some functions developed as part of the publishing process. The most significant of these inside the publishing house – at least from the writer's perspective – was that of the "reader." Deciding what to publish, whether by accepting a work submitted or by commissioning a book to fill an identified gap in the market, is one of the most fundamental activities of the publisher. It was a decision which was normally taken by the head of the firm, and if there was such a thing as an editorial policy it was he (rarely if ever "she") who devised and operated it. Growing professionalization, however, brought new actors into play. By the 1830s, there were a small number of British and American firms which were publishing 20

or more novels a year, many of them aimed at the increasingly important circulating library market. Much of this consisted of what would later be called "genre" or "formula" fiction, conforming to unwritten conventions and written solely as a commercial project. The publisher had to distinguish between wheat and chaff, a distinction which was more likely to be between books which were commercially viable and those which were not rather than a decision based on literary merit. Some principals effectively delegated this within the firm. By the middle decades of the century, a few were employing – usually on commission rather than as employees – "experts" who would at least do the initial sift through work which was submitted. Some of these readers became powerful in their own right – perhaps the most famous example was Geraldine Jewsbury – and others were subsequently distinguished figures either as men or women of letters or indeed in other professions, such as John Morley, reader for Macmillan and future MP and cabinet minister as well as the archetypal late Victorian *littérateur* (Feather, *History*, 139–140).

Agents, Authors, and Publishers

The use of readers and their influence on publishing decisions was only one aspect of the professionalization of publishing in the nineteenth century. Publishing houses were increasingly profit-oriented and were beginning to employ professionals whose expertise was in the management of a business rather than in publishing itself (Weedon 89–109). This put writers in a different and arguably more difficult position than they had known in the past. Even in the days of the premodern family businesses there had always been some tensions between authors and publishers as they strove to share the limited profits of a title. But as firms grew – even if they remained as family firms, as most did until well into the twentieth century – there was a parallel growth in inequity between the two parties. An author might write one or two books a year; by the end of the nineteenth century, a large firm was publishing 50 or more. The imbalance of experience and expertise put all the cards in the publisher's hand. This does not mean that they were exploitative (although some were), but they were powerful, controlling the only means by which writers could put their work in front of its intended audience.

The nineteenth century was also, however, a time of unprecedented opportunities for authors. The proliferation of magazines and newspapers provided hundreds of outlets for their work which had never previously existed. New practices such as syndication gave access to wider markets. Developments in copyright law in the first half of the nineteenth century gave British authors enhanced rights in their works for a longer period of time. These changes also opened up the possibility of creating what would later be called subsidiary rights in dramatizations, serializations, and – to a limited extent – editions for sale in colonial and overseas markets (Seville). At the same time, American publishers were developing their own overseas markets as well as importing and reprinting (legally or otherwise) British books (Winship). Yet by

and large, it was still the normal practice in the first half of the nineteenth century for authors to enter into agreements with publishers which put all the real power in the publisher's hands. Although the historic practice of a single payment in return for all the rights in a work was no longer prevalent by about 1830, it had been replaced by a system which could be almost as insidious. This was the "half-profits" arrangement under which the author and publisher shared the net profits of the work once all the costs had been met. For an author dealing with an honest publisher – and all the major houses and many minor ones were honest – this could be argued to be a fairer division of the spoils. Indeed, it might even have been argued, at least in strictly economic terms, that it was more favorable to the author since it was the publisher who took all the direct financial risks of the transaction. On the other hand, if a book sold steadily but slowly over a period of time, it could be years before the writer derived any income from it as it crawled toward meeting its costs. The gradual evolution of a percentage royalty system seemed beneficial to both sides (Leary and Nash 188–191).

The essence of the royalty system, which gradually spread throughout the publishing world, is that the author's contract with the publisher specifies a fixed payment for every copy sold. Typically, this is a percentage (usually 10 percent) of the publisher's income from each copy. We find royalties being offered by some publishers in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. It is not clear how the practice started, although it is possible that it was in textbook publishing where books often take a long time to establish themselves but then have a long life. Whatever its origins, however, for the authors of books it had clear advantages over either outright sale of copyright or half-profits, precisely because it is based on income not profit. When the British novelist Walter Besant brought together a number of his fellow writers in the Society of Authors in 1884 one of their objectives was to press for the universal adoption of the royalty system, a target which they had largely achieved by the early years of the twentieth century (Bonham-Carter 119–144; Leary and Nash 205–213).

No contractual arrangement between an author and a publisher can ever be without risk on both sides. There are, however, particular problems for literary writers, especially as publishing became more business-like and more profit-oriented from the early nineteenth century onward. By the middle decades of the century, the most successful authors (who were not necessarily those whom later generations would judge most favorably) were using managers to negotiate on their behalf and to make arrangements with publishers, and with newspaper and magazine editors, and even – in the case of Dickens and a few others – to organize author tours in both Britain and the United States (Cross 210–211). Some of these arrangements depended on personal friendships or relationships (Charles Dickens and John Forster; George Eliot and George Henry Lewes), but some were entirely commercial. In the 1870s there were several agents operating in this way, some of them distinctly dubious in their competence and standards. But one was not. A.P. Watt, an American living in London who knew the publishing and literary worlds on both sides of the Atlantic, was not only successful but also scrupulous in his dealings with both authors and publishers.

In 1881, he began calling himself a "literary agent," the first to use the title in Britain, and by the middle of that decade his business was well established and highly regarded. With Watt, a new player entered the publishing industry and the world of authorship (Cross 211–212; Leary and Nash 203–204; Waller 620–630). He was also an unwitting precursor of the huge American commercial and cultural influence on English-language publishing from the late nineteenth century onward (West 87–89).

A good agent soon became indispensable for a commercially minded author, and even many who saw themselves primarily as literary writers, such as Thomas Hardy and George Meredith, began to use them to considerable effect. For a writer aiming at the popular end of the market they were all but indispensable by the end of the century. It was Watt, for example, whose advice ensured the continuing monetary as well as reputational success of Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories by helping him to publish them on favorable terms (McDonald 137–144). The new British writers who emerged in the 1890s, including George Gissing and H.G. Wells, made highly effective use of agents to ensure their commercial success, despite the former's contempt for the growing commercialism of the literary world (Cross 238).

In the harsh world of late Victorian publishing, agents were a boon to authors and helped them to reduce some of the inequalities which exist in a relationship between an individual and a large company. Another key factor was the growing influence of the Society of Authors (Leary and Nash 205–213). While the Society's immediate objective was to promote the royalty system, it soon took on many other roles. One of them was to give advice to aspirant authors, and this soon included both the advice to use an agent whenever possible and – as importantly – which agents to use and which to avoid. By the end of the nineteenth century, both inside and outside the trade, the Society was coming to be treated as an equal partner in its affairs. It was, for example, involved in the negotiations which led to the formulation of the Net Book Agreement, which allowed a minimum retail price to be fixed for books (and which it strongly supported), and was consulted by the Board of Trade in the discussions on copyright when the implications of the Berne Convention, the development of new media, and other matters were incorporated into English law in 1911 (Bonham-Carter 145–165, 187–208).

The role of the agent was a product of evolution rather than planning, and of opportunism as well as necessity. Authors, however successful they were, needed advice about the increasingly complex world of publishing. A few entrepreneurs recognized this and established themselves as go-betweens and negotiators. Most agents had – as they still do – a background in the publishing industry. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine that an agent could be successful without the inside knowledge of the industry which can only be gained by working in it. By the middle decades of the twentieth century, authors relied on their agents not only for advice on which publishers to approach and what terms to accept, but also on literary matters. By the second half of the century, agents had become the gatekeepers which publishers had once been (Higham). Of course, publishers continued to read – or to cause to be read on their behalf – work which was submitted to them, and continued to identify gaps

in the market and commission books. As the process of amalgamation and the creation of multinational conglomerates began in the 1960s, however, editors perhaps became more distant from their authors and from the literary world (Epstein 93–124). The agents provided an essential link. A respected agent recommending a book, especially a book by a new author, could be immensely influential in actually persuading the publisher to consider it at all. Agents were taking on the role once exercised by the publisher, reading submissions, analyzing the market, and helping authors to produce manuscripts in a condition which publishers would find acceptable (Bradley 177, 187, 264–265; Thompson 58–99).

Making the Contemporary Publishing Industry

The customs and practices of publishing in the middle decades of the twentieth century had evolved over a period of more than 300 years. As late as the 1960s, it was still characterized by relatively small firms; a large number of retail outlets, many of them also very small; and a regulated market which gave security and stability to existing players. Authors and their agents were seen as part of this somewhat introspective world in which the majority of players were more interested in books than they were in money; perhaps as a consequence, margins were tight, profits were small, and cash-flow could often be precariously low. Of course, there were exceptions to all of this. In every generation there were innovators and entrepreneurs, not least among the European refugees and exiles who fled from fascism, war, and communism. But, by and large, even they did more of the same; some of them went into relatively new fields (art books, for example, and scientific publishing), but firms were still limited in size and often in ambition (Abel and Graham). Descriptions of the publishing industry written in the 1960s and early 1970s could have been written at almost any time since World War I.

The industry was ripe for change and even for predation. Indeed, beneath the relatively calm surface, change had been taking place, especially in the two key publishing countries, the United Kingdom and the United States, which shared the inestimable advantage of what was rapidly becoming the global language of business, science, and politics. The industry in Britain was carefully controlled by the Net Book Agreement for virtually the whole of the twentieth century. Comparable restrictions on domestic free trade would have been illegal in the United States, but the British and American publishers colluded in the Market Rights Agreement, under which they effectively shared the world market for English-language books between them until it too was subjected to legal challenges in the American courts and immediately collapsed (Feather, *History*, 192–193). The growth of genuine competition for the ever increasing international market for books in English was one of the key factors in the growth of multinational companies which could operate in that market.

A global process of mergers and acquisitions began in the late 1960s and continued unremittingly until the end of the century. While historic names and imprints often

survived – although there were exceptions such as Longman – the companies which used them were transformed. The creation of such giants as HarperCollins as only one strand in the operations of News International brought some of the most prestigious British and American imprints into the same group. Time-Warner brought together venerable publishing houses such as Random House with *Time* magazine and the Hollywood production company Warner Brothers, all to be overshadowed by a merger with America On-Line, the first of the great international internet service providers. In Europe, the German Holtzbrinck Group spread its net far and wide, eventually to encompass Macmillan, as did the Bertelsmann Group, also German, and Hachette from France. Book publishing was a significant, but not necessarily predominant, part of these conglomerates. Some focused on newspapers, some on movie production, the music industry or broadcasting, and some on developing the potential of delivering digital content. Even on a domestic scale, when Penguin, Longman and the children's book publisher Ladybird Books came together under the umbrella of the Pearson Group, conventional books were competing against new media delivery of learning materials for schools and colleges, in a context of developments which made the *Financial Times*, also a part of the group, one of the world's major sources of high-quality and very high cost financial information services (Coser et al. 36–69; de Bellaigue; Feather, *History*, 222–225; Thompson 100–145).

Book publishing has not fared as badly as many predicted when the conglomeration process became visible in the 1980s. Small independent publishing houses have survived, and some have flourished, not least because they can deal with shorter print runs and more specialized sales outlets in a way that the conglomerates find commercially unattractive. For the publication of fiction and poetry, the independents are culturally vital. Near universal access to the web has, if anything, made their task easier, for they can both sell their books through their websites directly to customers, rather than having to tout them around often reluctant bookshops to find a retail outlet, and they can – as some are now doing – sell direct access to electronic content.

A second key consideration, however, has been that some of the traditional cultural practices of publishing have survived inside the conglomerates. The continued use of historic imprints is one indicator of this, but there are also some less visible factors which have enabled the continuation of high-end publishing in a harsh commercial environment. Key senior editors on both sides of the Atlantic have set and maintained high standards in selecting work for publication. Working with their marketing departments, and making full use of the whole variety of contemporary media, they have turned authors into celebrities and made certain aspects of book publishing a high-profile activity. The major prizes for new work, for example, are regularly reported in the tabloid as well as the broadsheet press, and are featured on television news bulletins as well as in specialist radio and television shows about the book world. The jeremiads from some – although by no means all – traditional editors, authors and agents have proved to be at least partly unfounded.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the publishing industry at the beginning of the twenty-first century is precisely that – an industry. It respects its roots – a surprising

number of people in the trade are historically aware – but it also recognizes the need to embrace change in order to survive. Nowhere has this been more obvious than in the final link in the chain of book supply – the retail book trade.

The Retail Revolution: The Remaking of British Bookselling

As publishing became a distinctive activity in Britain in the early nineteenth century, the identity of bookselling became even more diverse. At one extreme were great stores in the major cities and leisure resorts and at the other there were shops in small country towns which sold a handful of books among a multitude of other goods. There was also everything in between, as well as tradesmen who were wholesalers or distributors, remainder merchants (or remainder retailers), the owners of circulating libraries who also sold books, or specialists in some particular field such as school books, travel books or religious books. By the middle of the nineteenth century there was an established pattern of trade, although there were many variations on it. The fundamental shape, however, was clear; publishers produced books which were sold through wholesalers to retail booksellers. Some publishers acted as their own wholesalers and had a distribution arm. Some booksellers, especially at the smaller end of the trade, relied on the wholesalers and distributors to select stock for them.

Pricing structures were similarly variable, ranging from the inflexible to the entirely fluid. Across the trade as a whole it was recognized that there were more or less standardized prices for certain kinds of books: £1 11s 0d or 10s 6d per volume for a three-volume novel; 6s 0d for a single-volume reprint of the same novel; 1s 0d for books in cheap reprint series, and so on. Although books were advertised at a particular price, usually by the publisher, the prices at which they were sold to wholesalers or direct to retailers were not fixed. In places where there was significant competition between bookshops, their owners would demand, and often receive, substantial additional discounts to enable them to sell at a lower price than the publisher's "standard." This unregulated competition was to bring the trade close to disaster. In the 1820s, the 1840s, and again and finally in the 1890s, attempts were made to develop a different sort of pricing regime. In its ultimate form, developed under the leadership of Sir Frederick Macmillan between 1890 and 1900, publishers could fix the minimum retail price of each book, on the understanding that this price would be substantially discounted in selling from publisher to bookseller. This system, embodied in the Net Book Agreement, prevailed in Britain from 1900 to 1995.

During those 95 years, according to its proponents, the Net Book Agreement promoted the diversity and cultural richness of British publishing. It allowed publishers to issue marginally profitable books of high literary or scholarly value while at the same time allowing them to recoup their investments. At the more profitable end of the trade, publishers were able to benefit in full from the fruits of their investments in titles which were a commercial success, while they were also offered a degree of protection when they made mistakes. This whole argument was rehearsed publicly

on several occasions, and from before World War I until the 1980s commanded general support. The critics of the Agreement always took several different contrary views. There were those – "free traders" in pre-1914 liberalism, "free marketeers" in 1980s conservatism – who simply opposed price regulation as a matter of principle. There were others who argued, perhaps with less ideological baggage, that the effect was to maintain the price of books at an artificially high level. There were also critics who claimed that far from promoting diversity, the control of book prices and the virtual guarantee of profits on any title which sold had a stultifying effect which militated against taking risks in publishing innovative or controversial works. Certainly it was the case that for almost the whole of the twentieth century the book trade in Britain existed in a protective cocoon in which it could, to some extent, ignore developments in the world around it. It was in part because of this that it was so vulnerable to takeovers and mergers and to competition from the more adventurous publishers of the United States.

One undoubted consequence of the Net Book Agreement – and one which was often evoked in its defense – was the proliferation and survival of large numbers of relatively small bookshops as well as thousands of other outlets at which book could be bought. Even potential competitors such as book clubs were controlled by the Agreement, as were discounted sales in bulk to schools, colleges, and libraries. By the 1980s, the model was unsustainable economically, socially, and politically. Two key entrepreneurs – Terry Maher and Tim Waterstone – revolutionized the trade. Maher took over existing shops, notably those of the long-established London academic bookseller Dillon's, while Waterstone opened new shops across the country. They had similar principles – make the shops attractive and customer-friendly (far from being the norm in the trade until then); display books so that the most popular were the most obvious; help customers to find what they wanted; and offer high levels of service. In other words, they brought some of the normal principles of high-street retailing to a trade which had little knowledge or experience of such matters. The one established national chain soon followed their example. W H Smith which had a near monopoly in many provincial towns found itself with new competitors and followed their example. It was eventually Smiths which destroyed the Net Book Agreement by simply withdrawing from it. It was too large to ignore because in addition to its retail business it was a major wholesaler of books, magazines, and newspapers. The Net Book Agreement collapsed in a matter of months, and the world did not end (Thompson 26–57).

It did, however, change. The chain bookshops could do what they had always wanted to do – compete on price. Deals which were more reminiscent of supermarkets than the genteel world of bookselling became commonplace: "two for the price of one," "buy one, get one free," or simply "20% off" became familiar to customers in bookshops. There is ample evidence that more books were sold as a consequence. Even literary fiction experienced boom years for both sales and readership at the turn of the twenty-first century. As in publishing, however, there were prophets of doom as these changes unfolded. It was argued that the chains, with their immense buying power,

were able to negotiate deals with publishers which were simply not available to smaller independent bookshops trying to continue to operate their traditional model. This was clearly true, and many independents closed in the 15 years after 1995. There were also some more subtle losses. The large chains were at their best and their most commercially successful when they were dealing with large-scale suppliers. Chain bookstores and conglomerate publishers can talk to each other at the same level and in the same language. For small independent publishers, this was not quite so easy.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, publishers had depended on an itinerant sales force of representatives who traveled the country soliciting orders for new titles. Booksellers were used to dealing with these commercial travelers, and to giving orders of relatively small quantities which the salesmen were happy to accept. But with conglomeration came centralization, a trend exacerbated by the increasing cost of maintaining this sales force, and the chain bookstores' own wish to centralize their buying and accounting operations. Managers were left with some scope for book selection at local or even shop level, but this was often interpreted to mean forming a judgment of how many copies of a centrally promoted or selected title the local market could absorb, and perhaps buying some books which were of local or regional interest. The independent publishers, it was alleged, were put at a massive disadvantage by these developments.

Up to a point this was true, since shelf space was precious and high-profile shelf space even more so. To some extent, the internet came to rescue, by allowing direct sales from small publishers to their equally small markets. But there is no question that some cultural diversity has been lost even as books have become more widely available to more people than at any time in the past. That is the great paradox of the contemporary book trade. The complex relationship between writers, their agents, their publishers, and their readers operates in a framework which is not merely commercial – it has been that for centuries – but which is both global and local in its scope. Yet the writer remains at the very heart of the process, the primary producer of goods which attract added value at every point as they make their way to the reader's hand and mind.

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12
The Changing Role of the Editor: Editors Past, Present, and Future

Frania Hall

The Codex Sinaiticus, one of the most important early books in the world, was written in the 4th century CE. This Bible, representing one of the first examples of a large-scale book bound (originally) in one volume, contains over 23,000 corrections. The editorial debates in the Codex center around issues such as translation and the interpretation of words and sentence structure, and they were undertaken by a variety of different people. The editorial work that continued on this manuscript over many years shows how important the craft of the editor has been from the days of the earliest surviving books. So the editor has had a place in the development of books for thousands of years. Is the role still the same today? What is the future for the editor as books continue to evolve and move from physical to digital formats?

The term editor is used loosely across a variety of publishing roles from those who commission books in publishing houses to those responsible for bringing together and directing material for newspapers and magazines. In this article the focus is on editors within book publishing, a role that appears to be under pressure given the challenges facing publishing as a whole with the development of digital products.

Editors vary according to the type of publishing they are in; publishers of medical material will have a different approach to their work from those working on fiction titles. There will often also be a difference in the editorial style of those who work in smaller independent publishing houses compared to those who operate within the context of a multinational company. But in all these cases, the essential skills and roles of the editor remain similar, as will be seen.

Exploring the question of whether the role of editor will be needed in its current format, the chapter will consider the changing nature of this role, which has shown itself to be able to evolve and adapt as the industry has grown and changed. One aspect of the editor's role that has disappeared, in most cases for good, is the long editor's lunch to entertain authors; even the launch party and the author tour are less key to the publishing process for all but the biggest books. Others would argue that the line-by-line attention to detail has also become a thing of the past for editors. Mistakes have always happened in publishing but the message came home to the public when the long awaited novel from Jonathan Franzen was published containing many errors; they had already been corrected once, but they reemerged in the final edition of the UK version. This is the realization of many an editor's worst nightmare.

But editors have changed as new challenges have arisen, whether from changed demands from an increasingly competitive industry or as new roles have impinged on their areas of expertise, such as the rise in literary agents. Despite these threats for the editor, digital publishing offers many important opportunities.

Terminology

Literally the word "editor" develops from the term "edition" first used in the late sixteenth century and more widely in the seventeenth century in relation to the editions, or sets of books, put forth by a publisher. An edition is one of the forms in which a work is published and issued at one point in time. And so those involved in this process become known as "editors," who indeed "edit."

The term editor, applied in a book publishing context, is one that encompasses a variety of activities. These tasks can essentially crystalize around two core functions: first that of commissioning – the "what" of writing; and second that of correcting, smoothing, and rewriting text – the "how" of writing.

Let's take the second point to start with: how a book is written. This has always formed a key part of the role. The level of written input on the text varies. Many editors have reinforced the need for their work to be the unseen part of the publication, the work that enhances the book but does not detract from the voice of the author. Some authors need very little work at all, delivering polished manuscripts that are ready to print. Others need rewriting to ensure their message is clear. But for the most part the editor will make suggestions to authors, possibly about structure or characterization or length, at a reasonably early stage and later makes minor adjustments and corrections as the book is prepared for press. It is this aspect that is becoming more threatened as publishing has developed.

The "what" of publishing, the choices made on what to publish depending on the publishing house, has not always been part of the editorial role. In small organizations the publisher is often the person acquiring texts but these days most editors will be

responsible for signing up a range of authors and titles, researching the market in order to make effective choices.

These are the two core aspects of the editor's role but as will be seen below there are many job titles encompassing the word "editor" that have evolved within publishing houses, all with subtly different jobs. An author might deal with several different types of editor while working on one single title. A final point to note is that because of the development in the role within modern industry, the term "publisher" and "editor" are in some organizations rather indistinguishable. As editors have become more closely involved in choosing books, negotiating for rights and understanding the financial aspects of not just their own titles but their whole lists, so these roles encompass what early publishers might have done. A publisher in a large organization will have responsibility for groups of editors and the work they undertake, and will clearly be closer to the investment needed to keep the house moving forward.

The Origins and Rise of Editors

As can be seen from the Codex, the first editors of the modern age were essentially scholars. As soon as words were written in some form or another, and people who weren't the originator of those words worked with the text, so the role of the editor came into existence. Early precursors of editors today might be the scribes working with the words of an older text, debating the detail of translations maybe or altering words to give a more accurate rendition of a classical work. As editors today are also often the selectors of material for publication, an early form of acquisitions editor could include the commissioners of these works – high church men or royal patrons who ordered the collection and translation, as well as copying, of particular works. Decisions were made about what to have written, as well as how it was written. These decisions, as outlined above, remain fundamental to the work of editors today.

Aldus Manutius, the fifteenth-century publisher, utilizing the invention of the printing press, recognized the need for Greek and Latin reference works which could help scholars unlock the secrets of the classical texts being rediscovered at a rapid rate during the humanist movement and subsequent Renaissance. So compilers and editors were employed to develop these titles and he understood that the quality of the editing was a critical part of their production. This is just one example of a clear vision in developing a new list for a growing market, one which marked a significant stage in the history of publishing. In addition, Aldus made decisions about the way the books would be presented in relation to their market potential, which included developing a new format, octavo sizes, which was more portable, and commissioning a new type design which allowed a more economical use of the page.

As the market for books grew throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries so the types of books published to cater for a larger and more segmented literate market began to vary. Publishers and editors (who might often be the same people)

spotted new opportunities and looked for titles that would fulfill different market demands. By the nineteenth century this market was rapidly becoming a mass market opportunity. Publishers could be found exploiting various markets through reissues of bestsellers in different formats (hardbacks for the library market followed by cheaper paperbacks) or commissioning the sensationalist literature of the penny dreadfuls, or seeking out American novels ideally suited to the new market of railway travelers. These are all the sorts of decisions editors make today as they develop new titles for particular markets.

The development in the position of author also led to development in the role of editors. As authors increasingly moved from one-off fee-based payments to royalties based on contracts, so editors became more involved in developing relationships with authors that would be as fruitful as possible, on a continuing basis, given the length of contracts. They would tirelessly explore ways of managing a series of new editions in different formats to increase the success of titles by existing authors. They understood the risks they were taking when they committed to publishing a new author.

As the role of editor and publisher became more professional, so editors relied more frequently on key people, some of whom were well known in their own right, to help advise on the growth of their lists. These readers become more visible during the middle of the nineteenth century. They were (and are) the well-read people who gauged the tenor of the times and reviewed projects and manuscripts for editors to test their potential; they were looking to see not just whether or not the book would be a success, but whether it had a natural fit with the policy of the house.

New publishers emerged during the nineteenth century and took their publishing houses in specific directions according to some form of editorial policy. Some publishers took the approach that they would commission and edit books following their own political and social opinions: John Cassell, for instance, was a keen advocate of the temperance movement and published titles aimed at self-improvement; for others, while books might still need to be worthwhile, they also needed to make a certain level of profit, regardless of any personal views of the publisher, and a more "commercial" list might be developed. So publishing houses followed the style of their key personnel: their publishers and editors.

By the twentieth century, competition was fierce. Many publishing houses had relied on Victorian bestsellers but needed a supply of newer literature to keep ahead. The importance of the author and the rights they had over the work they wrote, a recognition that had been growing throughout the nineteenth century, were acknowledged more fully and led to changes in copyright law to protect the value of the content that authors provided. The potential for books was growing: opportunities spread beyond the home market with developments in global distribution as well as the prospect for some books to become radio plays, and later films. In addition, as authors became more aware of their worth, so the role of the agent developed rapidly to support the author in negotiating increasingly complex publishing contracts. These important developments led publishing houses to review editorial policies. It was another step in the growing professionalism of publishing as houses had to develop a

policy to enable editors to ensure that their list could forge ahead of the competition, attracting key authors, negotiating key contracts with experts in the form of agents, and working with their material to make it as good as possible to maintain an edge. So the twentieth-century editor began to fall into a reasonably distinctive role that can be recognized today in the twenty-first century.

The Editor's Responsibilities

So what is the editor's role? As mentioned, there are various different job titles that encompass "editor." There are commissioning editors, acquisitions editors, assistant editors, technical editors, development editors, desk editors, and of course simply editors. Definitions for these terms and roles vary according to publishing house.

In most circumstances when referring to editors within the publishing industry, it is the role of the commissioning editor that is being considered, the person working most closely with the author to sign up a new book project. Commissioning editors, or acquisitions editors, decide what to publish. Distinctions even between these two terms are vague. Looked at literally, a commissioning editor may be expected to be the person who comes up with an idea, explores options as to who might best write the book and commissions that person to do so, while an acquisitions editor acquires titles that may already be reasonably well formed, whether close to a final manuscript or a book already published, maybe in a different language or area of the world (Davies and Balkwill 58); even a well-considered synopsis that may have come through an agent could fit this distinction of being an acquired title rather than commissioned. However, distinctions in the industry between these terms are less clear-cut and it can depend on geographical region or area of specialism as to which term is most usually applied.

If we look at the commissioning/acquisitions role the editors are the face of the industry, signing up the titles that will bring in the revenue for the publishing operation. They are the beginning of the publisher's value chain, the people who are seeking out and dealing with the intellectual property, the content, that will start its journey through the publishing house. They will also be the people who oversee the progress of the content through the chain of processes such as editing, producing, marketing, and distributing, trying to ensure that each stage adds some sort of value to the content, so increasing its worth in the marketplace, attracting consumers to buy it and making a profit. The editors are therefore present throughout the process of creating and protecting value in terms of the books produced.

In addition to this, the editors need to ensure they keep up a level of activity that will keep the publishing program moving. Publishing houses continuously publish titles. They need to do this when titles come off the frontlist as readers move on to something new, so fresh titles are needed to replace them. Signing up titles that will last and create a healthy backlist is obviously the ideal, but there are significant amounts of publishing that are "for the moment"; as the trend moves on, editors are

constantly searching for the next title. Their decisions can make or break a small publishing house: if a title succeeds the operation can continue, but with a run of poor titles any profits made by the bestsellers quickly get eaten up. So the editors act as the gatekeepers for the publishing house (Davies and Balkwill 52), selecting projects on the basis of good fit with the list and with the house's policy, as well as their judgment of the commercial opportunity. They cannot make a project happen alone – other departments must buy into the project for it to proceed – but they will decide what to put to their committees for consideration. A book will not make it at all if it does not get past the editor.

So the search for authors and ideas is key. Unlike many manufacturing industries where the product is produced by the company's own staff, or by a range of "professional" suppliers, a publisher depends on a large body of authors for its product. A publishing house can have hundreds of new product lines to launch in a year, all very different and individual, and an editor, the product manager, will have to manage a variety of new products all sourced from different suppliers. These suppliers, in other words the authors, are full of personality, whether easygoing or fractious, anxious or overconfident, and few of them will understand the intricacies of the publishing business (unlike "professional" suppliers whose business is much more integrated with the industry they serve). So the editor needs to work with authors, or the representatives of authors, the literary agents, to develop their ideas into a marketable product.

Decision-Making and Market Nous

Editors reach their decisions through a variety of ways. They need to understand the market in which their publishing house operates. This enables them to gauge most effectively what will be a successful title. Through research, analysis of the competition, observations of sales statistics, as well as discussions with a network of advisors, they will have built up a good grasp of their market. They will spot the gaps and opportunities that they can exploit, they will understand what a book needs to look like for that market (pastel covers for "chick lit" for instance), what sort of style of writing is appropriate, the price the book should be and the longer term opportunities to develop it further. They will be in touch with the subtle shifts of their market and be able to tap into a growing trend. To do this they need a complex range of contacts, often carefully nurtured over time, that may consist of trusted readers, other authors and writers, or experts in particular fields, who all help to provide knowledge and support for ideas that editors think could turn into a book proposal.

The editor will also base the decision on their estimation of the financial potential of a project. They will understand the variables around price, length, format, and potential sales in order to assess whether the project is viable. This aspect of an editor's role is critical. Throughout the publishing process the budget will be foremost in an editor's mind as adjustments to the original financial plan may need to be made depending on production and marketing issues. Understanding the pressure on profit

that can result from any changes in the project plan means the editor needs to have confidence in their control of the project as it develops. Sound financial skills are critical for a successful editor.

The Commissioning Process

Books rarely come in to an editor in full manuscript form. A synopsis should provide enough information for an editor to make an initial decision. This would include generally a rationale for the book, a detailed contents list, possibly sample material, together with an analysis in the author's view of the market and readership, and publication details such as planned length and delivery date. A synopsis can be developed further by editors working with the author to build a better picture of the project in order to be able to present this to a publishing committee. Agents may provide more fully fleshed projects to editors, having already worked with authors to expand on the background to an idea.

The editor will evaluate the synopsis, discuss it with colleagues, and if it looks as if it has some potential, may also send it out to external advisors to review. Further tweaking may go on in light of the comments and this process can take several months. The editor may have had discussions with marketing, publicity, and rights sales; in certain areas of trade publishing the input from these departments will be essential in order to understand the viability of the book before the project is formally presented. If the book is time sensitive the whole process can be considerably condensed.

At this stage the editor may be quite closely involved in the development of the book in terms of the structure and text itself. They will have read a quantity of material in order to evaluate the project or helped an author restructure their work. But there will equally be many cases where the editor can confidently move on to developing a proposal ready for other departments to review on the basis of much less involvement. Sometimes the pressure of time, where an editor may be bidding for a project offered to several publishers by an agent, will mean that decisions have to be made outside the usual procedures; in these cases a few senior people may be called in to consider the options quickly on bidding for a title that may cost a large amount of money, a price which has to be weighed up against possible financial or reputational returns.

However, usually the editor will have built a proposal covering the synopsis, the editor's own rationale and vision for the title, and the financial projections. The proposal will also include, in most cases, quantities of information about the project directed toward different internal departments, from marketing to production, and this will be circulated ready for the publishing committee meeting, the place where the project will be given the go-ahead or turned down. The publishing meeting, sometimes regarded as the alchemic arena of creativity for the publishing house, is much more of a professional meeting than its glamorous reputation for literary

excitement might suggest. Representatives of the publishing house decide whether to back the project and if so start to agree on some of the details for its planned publication.

If the editor has done a good job, they will have sold the project to the rest of the house, inspired them to throw their weight of resources behind it and get all the departments from marketing to production, sales to rights, to buy into it. From that point on the editor is constantly nurturing the project through to fruition.

Here the editorial role becomes less solitary as the editor works with other departments to bring the author under contract and slot the book into the publications program. Even a book not due for a couple of years will start to gain a life of its own as it is put into databases and gets its own ISBN number, as plans for marketing and advanced information are drawn up, and as it is given a position in the publishing program several years down the line. Indeed, any contracts are counted as company assets.

The editor at this stage is still the main person in contact with the author and will continue to nurture the author throughout the writing stages. They will manage a gamut of emotions from a range of authors, encouraging, cajoling or bullying them until they submit a manuscript. Once the manuscript is in-house the editor will read it, or have it read if necessary by experts in order to advise on whether further work is necessary, maybe on structural issues, or legal issues; the editor may decide to tackle any major stylistic problems directly themselves. More often than not, however, due to pressures to be discussed later, a brief skim read of the manuscript will be enough for the editor to pronounce it reasonable enough to put into production, and from there on the processes of the house, from marketing campaigns to cover designs, typesetting to printing and binding, as well as conversion to e-book formats will take over. The editor will be at all times in touch with the process.

The editor has the responsibility for building a list that has prestige and a good reputation, one that is meaningful to their market whether that audience is for a literary imprint or an academic textbook. The list needs to be coherent and reflect the right range and depth. Editors need to understand where the weaknesses are and the strengths, looking for opportunities to expand their lists where possible or understand what changes the market might expect in, for instance, digital accessibility. It is also important to carry out list housekeeping, making sure titles are in stock and priced correctly; that new editions are planned where relevant or new sales opportunities are explored.

The Publishing Web

Editors are often regarded as the center of a web of relationships, working collaboratively with most departments in a publishing house. Of course, these other departments are critical to the success of a title and reach out to connect to other parts of the publishing organization, but the editor tends to be the first point of contact for

the title and author, and takes the most responsibility for the title throughout its life from inception to the long tail. The editor therefore needs to be on top of most aspects of the title's progress, help adjudicate on most issues if necessary, and make the final decision in most cases after appropriate consultation.

So the editor will field the author through the marketing and publicity departments, ensuring the author's wishes are met or explaining to an author where those wishes might be impossible to fulfill. They ensure the marketing department have the right information about the title and are as up to date as they can be on it so that their marketing activities are true to the book's content and are ready at the optimal time. The editor will also be in touch with sales, helping them with the information needed to prepare sales materials, presenting the rationale to them, and liaising to ensure marketing and sales ideas are injected into the plan for the book (maybe over cover designs or price points).

In relation to production and design the editor will be keeping a track on where their titles are, helping answer queries, liaising with the author over certain aspects, keeping the author working in a timely manner on any material they need to return, and working with production to solve problems such as word length, design issues, or budget constraints. They will be in constant contact with the rights team to keep them up to date with publication dates, prices, and contractual terms. The legal department will need to be kept informed of any contentious issues (libel for instance), as well as contractual issues that need to be noted. In relation to finance, the editor will be testing out the budget for the title, considering the publishing program longer term, and preparing sales forecasts. They will interact in some way with practically all departments of the publishing house, whether in assessing stock levels in the warehouse or checking royalty payments with accounts if an author queries them.

In all these aspects an editor needs to remain enthusiastic and purposeful, understanding when to compromise and when to insist on something. Courage is needed as they are the place where the final responsibility stops. All editors will have problem titles and titles that do not perform at all well. For that they have to take ultimate responsibility as they were the original and final champion for the title. But where a title succeeds, it is the team as a whole that will have won that success.

Other Types of Editor

There are other editors with more specific boundaries to their roles whom authors may well come across. Development editors are found in certain publishing houses. They will be responsible for working on the development of the title before it moves into production. Some of the copy-editing work and layout work may occur under the remit of this role but often development editors are linked closely to commissioning editors rather than production, as sections of the content are still in formation. This can occur for titles that may require a large amount of picture research or commissioning of illustrations and artwork (for a geography textbook, for instance), where

permissions need to be sought for material and captions written, or where close working with the author is critical in some way or other, maybe to adjust sections for particular readerships,.

The desk editor role crosses over that of development editors. In-house desk editors may be required for titles that need a lot of textual work or detailed marking up ready for production. In some houses this role will be subsumed into production (often to be managed by production editors), and copy-editing and proofreading will be carried out by freelancers in their entirety. However, publishing houses responsible for large quantities of accurate and detailed work on the text (such as reference publishers), or where conformity to complex house styles is critical and high quality essential (such as scholarly publishing) will have desk editors. They may use a network of freelancers but they will also be much more directly involved in the readying of the text for publication than most other editorial roles.

Technical editors are somewhat less likely to sit within publishing houses, though there are certain sectors (such as legal publishing) where technical editors will work continuously on material in-house. Their responsibility is to understand their subject (for instance, science and medicine) and ensure works are technically accurate. Technical editors might do quite a lot of technical writing themselves; they may not always know much about the mechanics of publishing, but they are essential for ensuring the quality of the work.

Editorial Skills

As an industry, book publishing relies on authors for its product. Editors will often be dealing with people who do not always have a close understanding of the industry, and who operate in a much more individual way. These are creative people themselves, needing support, nurturing, and understanding. Editors are their lifeline into the publishing house, even though at one remove because of their agent. Good editors understand the subtle demands of this relationship and recognize that authors are key to the success or failure of the business. They therefore need to be diplomatic, and understand how to deal with people and support their various needs. Not many product managers in industry need to worry about writer's block, but editors may need ways of coping with this if it is a problem faced by their author. Creative flair is important, whether attracting and inspiring authors, thinking up new ideas for commissioning, crafting titles, or understanding how to unleash potential. And all this needs to be combined with a sound sense of commercial realism.

Editors help represent the author in-house, fielding queries, supporting the author as their project progresses through the various stages of publishing. This works two ways; sometimes the editor may be putting the author's case for particular things such as an increase in the artwork budget; at other times the editor has to take a firm hand with authors to explain why one thing works better than something else. This may come up particularly in relation to cover design and, when things get heated, editors

may even need to point out the lines of demarcation laid out in the contract around the extent of author involvement in publishing decisions. So the editor has to combine a belief in the author with a professionalism that makes it clear where the boundaries are set, all the time ensuring a strong and enduring relationship is built up that may be fruitful for years to come.

The editor is in many ways a sales person – selling the title many times over, to the editorial committee, to all those involved in-house in putting the project together, to the sales reps who will sell the book to the wider market, to other potential authors they want to attract to the list, and to customers through blurbs and marketing copy. Enthusiasm and persuasiveness therefore are important attributes.

Project management and organizational skills are also critical and we have seen how an editor oversees the book through the various stages in the publishing house. Clearly other departments become closely involved in managing the book stage by stage, but the person expected to act as a default for knowledge of where the book is in any of these processes is the editor. Allied to that is the firm control that needs to be kept on the costs of the book, and decisions to be made on, for instance, production issues.

The two particular criteria at the top of an editor's list in trying to get manuscripts in will be time and length. The implications of these are considerable. Costs will go up if a manuscript is overlength, which can put pressure on price; and if a publication date is delayed the book may miss key marketing opportunities or seasonal sales, be outstripped by more timely competition, and lose slots booked in bookshop windows. So an editor will be constantly planning for success, preempting problems and double checking that the project is on course in these two key areas. They will also have to deal with difficult people and look at ways of damage limitation, maybe employing some of their creativity to smooth out tricky situations.

This is not to say that these aren't skills as necessary in other parts of the business, but the public face of the editor as he or she reaches out to the outer world where the author exists is a particularly defining characteristic of the role. A calm but enthusiastic editor will go a long way to manage an author crisis.

Modern Commissioning Editors: Working beyond the Call of Duty?

How has the role of editors changed? When Diana Athill stated that "my job was to edit, copy-edit, proof-read, and also to look after the advertising" she openly admitted that the financial side of the publishing business, which she recognized was of great importance, was not really of major interest to her (24, 7). Today's editors, on the other hand, need to be focused on the profit lines above most other considerations.

The change has come about for a variety of reasons, both structural and environmental. As publishing became more and more dominated by large media conglomerates over the second part of the twentieth century (Feather), the pressure grew on the

businesses to perform well financially. To grow in a marketplace that was not necessarily expanding (given competition from other forms of entertainment) meant developing certain strategies toward risk that often differed from earlier decisions. Taking a risk with a book that one simply thought was good figured less than the need to develop a book that could get as close as possible to being a guaranteed "bestseller".

The pressure for bestsellers comes also from booksellers, whose profit margins are always so tight that top-selling titles become key to their turnover; in order, therefore, to gain all-important bookshop display space, publishers have to give booksellers what they need to stay afloat – more bestsellers. That has led both to an increasing level of financial understanding among editors of the implications of price, print-runs and sales, and to a greater dominance of publications that try to copy the formulas of successful titles – following trends and hoping to gain predicable returns as opposed to attempting to set trends that may or may not take off. This is not true for the whole industry, of course; innovation remains critical and every good editor has a title on their list where they stuck their neck out and found they had a winner. Large corporations as much as nimble independent publishers are still interested in taking risks – the number of runaway successes from unexpected sources make it a critical and exciting aspect of publishing for the players involved. But it has had an effect across the industry on publishing output in the last decade.

As a result, editors have found their time put under pressure. Most editors have found their lists increase and the focus on profit has become prime. That in turn puts pressure both on the amount of time they have to do the close editorial work that the famous editors of the past were able to do, and also on the amount of money they can spend on having things read, rewritten, or thoroughly checked and corrected. There is a certain pressure, too, from readers who are not especially worried if the language is unexciting and grammar occasionally inaccurate when they are reading, for instance, a hastily put together celebrity biography. Any extra money spent on a stylish and elegant ghostwriter would not offer much in the way of good value in terms of the ultimate profit line, while getting the title out while the celebrity is still high in the public consciousness is worth spending money on.

This process has been of benefit to the literary agent, particularly in the US and UK. The pressure on time has led editors to devolve some of their responsibilities. Selecting potential ideas from a large pile of submissions can be extremely time-consuming. Dealing with the smaller queries of authors can be a distraction. Taking time to explain a contract to a new author every time a book is signed is something an agent can take on. Editors had these roles but as their lists grow, so dealing with another professional who knows how publishing works can be quick and efficient. Editors also find they can depend on the judgment of well-established agents to help select titles with the greatest potential; the role of the external reader therefore has declined.

A further critical change has been the development of digital production methods, and more recently digital products, at the beginning of the twenty-first century. As costs have been cut in production methods, supporting tighter print-runs and fast

printing, so again attention to detail can be sacrificed. The race to market, facilitated by new methods and the need to cut costs to keep prices down, has meant that some editorial stages get squeezed and again the effect is for editors to have less time to spend working on the text. There are other implications – the growth of self-publishing, facilitated by the ease of digital publishing, can bypass focused professional editorial work, and where authors retain digital rights, detailed editorial work may feature only on the print version of the text released by a publisher and not on the e-books released by the author, which can appear to devalue this sort of editorial work.

The focus of the editor in some cases is becoming more about choosing product than editing it. Here another trend emerges for the role of the editor. Selecting titles that will sell has meant a shift in the types of people that undertake editorial roles. There has been, in any case, a growing democracy in choosing titles to be taken on by a house, with committees, as outlined above, selecting books on the basis of their marketing, sales and rights opportunities, as envisioned by the marketing and sales people, as well as according to the editor's own instincts. So older editors who were skilled writers, well read and well connected, while still important, are being joined by colleagues whose expertise lies first in marketing and selling. They spot opportunities for new titles based on market-making rather than primarily on the assessment of the title; their understanding of good writing may not be as well honed as that of the editor, just as the understanding of appropriate sales strategies may not be as highly developed in traditional editors. This is not a problem; most modern editors should have a strong knowledge of the market, and those with marketing skills should have some understanding of text and content. Many houses would agree that a mixture of skills among their editors is valuable and the role of editor has become more of a hybrid, but it reflects a shift during recent decades away from expertise with text.

Thompson explores some myths in publishing (142) and debates how far this shift has really changed the focus of power in publishing. Have accountants and sales people taken over the decision-making? As we have seen, the process has become more consultative than it once was, but editors have developed a keener focus on markets and marketing, and as they are the driving force behind prospective new titles they still retain a considerable amount of power within a publishing house.

Another myth about editors that Thompson explores, one that has been emerging since the late 1990s, is that editors no longer edit. As agents wield increasing power in certain publishing sectors, editors are no longer as close to the author as they once were. An increased administrative burden of titles to see through to fruition and the possibility that detailed editorial work can be undertaken by agents may lead to editors doing no actual editing. But research has shown that editors, notwithstanding the changes in their roles, take pride and pleasure in the editorial work with the text that they still undertake. They continue to read as much as possible of the text,[1] make suggestions to authors, nurture them through the writing process, and work on rewriting where necessary, often doing this in their own time because of their passion for the books and the subject-matter. So, working beyond the call of duty, many

editors continue to preserve aspects of their roles that may appear on the surface to be somewhat outdated. There is still a consistent belief among editors that the quality of the book is important. This attention to quality may be something that becomes more important in light of the pressure from self-publishing. As more books are published by authors themselves, one of the defining features of a book that a publisher takes on may be the attention to textual detail and high quality that a publisher can offer.

The Death of the Editor?

From the early 2000s or so there has been a continuous stream of articles observing the changes, as outlined above, in the role of the editor and predicting trouble ahead. So what is the future of the editor? The world of long lunches and deeply collaborative work with authors, characterized by the reach for literary excellence and the taking of risks based only on gut instinct, now seems far away (and it may, in any case, have existed only for a short while). How far will any work on the text be squeezed out of the role altogether? Will publishing by committee leave no room for individual flair at spotting and nurturing talent? Will editors become content aggregators? Will even the role of choosing become redundant, with editors today making choices based on rankings, simply copying trusted formulas and, finally, only driven by the financial imperatives and targets of the publishing house? Will the attention to detail and the minutiae of text be a thing of the past?

In the matter of basic editorial skills, there seems to be the belief that they will remain critical. The internet increases the amount of information available, information of varying quality and accuracy. Sifting information and turning it into something usable and lasting, appropriately directed to the right market, is a critical editorial role that could easily be seen as growing in importance in an ever increasing internet space.

In 2002 Jason Epstein, in considering the changes in book publishing and looking ahead at digital opportunities, stated that "for books of lasting value there is no use hurrying this work for the sake of a schedule or budget" (36), underlining the importance of taking care over books. In addition, he observed that a certain feature of being an author, the need for nurture, to keep them going and help them to reach their best work, to "share their anguish and joy," will ensure that the more deeply rooted aspect of the editor's role will remain important.

The role of the editor also remains an important stamp of quality. At one level, trusted filters for content will always be necessary: even the individual who edits an inaccurate entry on Wikipedia is taking part in an important publishing process. There has been a study of self-published books developed within an interest community (Laquintano) that shows that these authors were all concerned to ensure their texts were of a high standard and sought various ways to ensure editorial work was undertaken on their books. This, it was felt, added to their credibility.

So a role continues for the editor to work with the author and edit texts appropriately. Yet self-publishing and open access may negate the need for commissioners of content. As digital products gain momentum in the marketplace, as the mass consumer market changes into increasingly specialized individualistic consumers who are able to access what they want when they want it via the internet, as the world of Web 2.0 allows user-generated material to gain wide dissemination at the touch of a button, where does the editor fit? Do filters, recommendations, and tags take over from the discrimination of the editor?

Within the reality of the publishing business there is still an interest in new products and new formats, and it is the editors who will help bring these to life. Editors will still be continuing to seek out bestsellers, new touchstones of mass consciousness; and the consumer will still like to ride the wave of the next big thing. But editors will also be looking at crafting newer types of products, from websites directed to fans of big brand-name authors, to sophisticated digital resources enhancing key literary works.

Here knowledge of the market will remain vital to the editor. Editors have always been in touch with their markets, understanding how those markets operate. This means they are able to continue the development of new products as well as explore innovative ways to sell them. So market vision remains critical and keeping in touch with those markets, especially as they fragment further into more specialized, individualized arenas, requires editors to have an eye for detail and understand the importance of nuance when creating products.

Editors working in-house on new digital products, apps, or enhanced e-books, for instance, will often talk about the changing nature of their role as one that makes them more like producers. While a more traditional model of the editor's role would mean engaging an author, maybe marshaling an author team, and following the somewhat linear process of the book through production, the editor now has to consider a wide range of additional aspects to the product, maybe video clips, audio material, photography, resources of all kinds, plus work with the digital experts that can enable this; they will need to consider a range of possible outcomes from the one content set, all the while of course watching the budget and assessing the potential returns. The skills needed remain similar – good decision-making, problem-solving, spotting potential, creative thinking about new ideas, working with teams to bring projects to fruition, and of course, financial nous; the change is that the arena in which an editor might work is wider.

So the editor has moved through many incarnations, though always with some sort of tie to the written material itself. The editor's roles, which used to be much more clear-cut, are now varied and increasingly specialized. At the heart of all editors is their passion and desire to work with books and the written word in whatever form. The combination of skills, an ability to work with people combined with sound commercial instincts, allied with attributes such as creativity and inspiration, enthusiasm and enterprise, will be the reasons why the role will remain key to publishing output in the future.

Note

1 Reading large parts of the text is less true of specialized publishing where experts are needed to verify the accuracy of the information.

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13
Translation as Creative Writing

Manuela Perteghella

Writers as Translators

Le devoir et la tâche d'un écrivain sont ceux d'un traducteur.

Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*

All writers *are* translators. Creative writing is above all a translational process. This stimulating process begins from the rational *and* subconscious states of the mind of the writer, containing the textual possibilities which are eventually translated, "carried across" – written down, transformed into linguistic signs – on the blank page. From a cognitive perspective, the processes at work in the act of writing and creative composition are studied as translation processes (see, for example, Fayol et al.). Both creative writing and translation as textual transformation of thoughts, words *and* worlds share a renewal ability and energy. Writing can be therefore understood, cognitively or metaphorically, as the translation of one's own voice into a creative, unique product, a text: "The authorial writer transforms feelings, observations, perceptions, thoughts, insights, memories, stories and flights of the imagination into a written text. So this act of writing is the translation of psychological reality into language, so that it can be shared with another person or persons" (Lee 1). Clive Scott, academic and translator, uses Marcel Proust's perception of translation as a "life" writing practice, where one must translate in order to write: "Proust listens to the text of his own life, in his own creative solitude, listens to a text which, because it is alien, can all the more fruitfully become his own, transforms a text that was an ending into a text that is a new beginning" (Scott, "Translation," 34).

A translational process thus underpins any creative writing project. The poet and translator Pierre Joris also defines writing, and even language itself, as translation: "Questioning the possibility of translation means to question the very possibility of literature, of writing, of language, which is always already a translation, i.e. is both an act of translation and the result of such act" (34, quoted in Loffredo and Perteghella, *One Poem*, 67). Translation, present in the act of writing, is not only possible, but essential to the production of literary work. It is an "imaginative" process, but also a "performative" one because the blank page, or the empty space on a computer screen or in a notebook can, and *should* be understood as a stage ripe for interpretation, for textual acts, where a particular performance will eventually take place: sketched, "handwritten, typed, word-processed, finally visible in [its] materiality" (*One Poem*, 90), where literary "props" are placed – orthographic characters staged in ways that create meaning; words assigned to particular deictic and kinetic configurations; sentences and linguistic structures used to create a particular stylistic device, be it figurative language such as metonyms and metaphors, ambiguity, puns and wordplays, a specific meter, or repetition of sounds. The imaginative product, the text, is shaped by linguistic constraints, often stylistic ones, and cultural and personal choices, and it is ultimately received, decoded and interpreted again and again by the reader. All writers *are* translators of their own idiolect and ideas, of their own life, but also, in this metaphor of translational processes in creative writing as essentially performative, they become at once performers of their own voices.

This performative process is even more foregrounded in "interlingual translation," which Russian linguist Roman Jakobson defines as "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of another language" (114). Like performance, translation becomes a semiotic activity, a decoding and reencoding of signs within the text which must be created using different verbal (rather than nonverbal) signs. Like performance, translation bestows a subjective possible understanding upon the source text and recreates this possibility, for different audiences to decode once again. A performance is not an "imitation or description of a past event," but rather a "*représentation*," a "making present," and thus "it abolishes that difference between yesterday and today . . . We can see how this is the renewal of [the] life" (Brook 155). In so doing, both translation and performance contribute to what German intellectual Walter Benjamin terms the "afterlife" of the "source" (language) text (17). This afterlife is, of course, only possible because the source text does already contain its own translatability (Benjamin 16), that is its inherent possibility to be (re)written and performed again and again, the "desire to be other, to be translated" (Scott, "Translation," 34). This translatability bestows upon the source text a necessary flexibility, making it open to interpretations and rewritings, which in turn guarantee its literary, creative, and cultural survival. From a theater semiotic point of view, Patrice Pavis states that the text is not something precious and unchallengeable, but rather "it has nothing permanent about it: it is of course materialized and fixed in writing and in book form, but it has to be constantly reread, and therefore concretized anew again and again, being therefore eminently unstable" (43).

The page, the bare stage, is however "not just an empty room in which the translator makes choices with regard to where to place and arrange objects," but rather, as a performative stage, it invokes "movement . . . and by doing so eliminates the distance separating the subject from the object, the translator from the text" (Loffredo and Perteghella, *One Poem*, 17). This movement does not only imply traveling to and from the different cultural, temporal spaces and geographies of the source text and its target text(s), creating possibilities and fictions; it further positions and repositions the translator, shifts perspectives and relationships between the translator's subjectivity and his or her cultural and literary awareness. Both translation and theater "locate its practitioners as non-centred points in an ever-fluctuating network of activity" (Johnston 16).

Translation sees writers involved not only with the materiality (and movement) of (their own) familiar language but also with different languages (grammatical structures, connotations and collocations, vocabulary, phonetics, stylistic conventions, genres) and diverse foreign cultures (geographically, socially, and temporally). Most importantly, they must translate and engage with different voices and idiolects present in the source language text, usually, but not exclusively, created by another writer. This further creative writing practice will inevitably affect or at least influence the writer-translator's own particular writing practice. The translation scholar and practitioner Susan Bassnett argues how translation can mean different things to creative writers: it can be appreciated and practiced as a "means of learning the craft of writing, for if writers can recognize and learn to speak in different voices it becomes more probable that they will identify a distinctive voice of their own," or as a distinct "literary activity," for example in the case of the nineteenth-century Romantic poets or the twentieth-century Modernist writers, and, naturally, as a means of "discovering new ways of writing" ("Writing and Translating," 174). Translation therefore plays a significant role for creative writers who work with foreign language texts. In particular, established writers, with their own recognizable, audible voices, (inter)act with other texts, and voices of other authors, and often with their own voices, as is the case with self-translation and literary bilingualism (Nikolaou, "Notes").

This interlingual translation involves of course the encounter with a foreign language and the way that opens up new possibilities of experimenting with one's own language. For the writer-translator, translational practice is, first, akin to his or her own creative writing practice (as a transformative, performative process); secondly, it can shape one's own idiolect and most importantly one's voice. Third, it provides ideas and inspires criticism for one's own creative writing practice, that is, it carries across a sense of renewal and discovery. It participates in the "continuum of a writer's life" (Bassnett, "Writing and Translating," 175) and it is "a reflection about language as a potentiality of expression for a particular writer-translator" (Scott, *Translating Rimbaud's Illuminations*, 13). Concomitantly, a translational practice aids writers to, well, write better texts, as Tim Parks, writer and translator, argues: "the hands-on experience of how another writer puts together his work is worth a year's creative writing classes. It is a loss that few writers 'stoop' to translation these days." Further, the

choices of texts to translate made by the writer-translator can also signify a particular affinity with another writer, as the Earl of Roscommon, back in the seventeenth century, put it: "Seek a *Poet* who *your* way do's bend, And chuse an *Author* as you chuse a *Friend*." The subsequent "sympathetick" bond that would develop may signify a connection with, or response to the creative and literary ecology that the foreign language writer has developed, which in turn may find echoes in the writer-translator's own work and literary landscapes, his or her own narratives. Further, the translator, by translating certain texts, becomes intimate not only with that particular text but with the writer's poetics. Bassnett even talks of "falling in love" and "falling out of love" with a specific writer and their work ("Writing and Translating," 117) at distinct times in a writer-translator's life.

While processual and metaphorical similarities have been described above, translation and creative writing are not just similar: most importantly for the endurance of their kinship, they are also different. Writer-translators are those who are best placed to detect differences with the two modes of writing: for Tim Parks "writing my own novels has always required a huge effort of organization and imagination; but, sentence by sentence, translation is intellectually more taxing," while Christopher Hampton, playwright, scriptwriter and translator, sees translation as an analyzing "discipline" that "works that writing muscle," adding that "writing plays is so difficult. So few people have actually managed to do what Chekhov or Ibsen did, that it's tremendously valuable to try to analyse it" (Baines and Perteghella 176).

Moreover, while the writer-translator works already with a source text, constraints and challenges are here provided not only by different linguistic signs, structures and cultural presuppositions which are implied in the source text (because writers, even in this increasingly globalized planet, and international publishing industry, do write texts in particular contexts, which are always culture-bound) but above all by the inventive devices used to create certain effects, in the employment of particular stylistic forms. The stylistic and linguistic constraints which the source text writer imposes on his or her writing are seen as a source and stimulus of creativity for the source text writer, and subsequently for the translator who must engage with them (Boase-Beier and Holman 17). Translating therefore encompasses strategies to deal with such constraints. These strategies are often termed "compensation" strategies, which imply a (possible) stylistic loss in the target text, which must be recuperated with an equivalent or similar effect (see, for example, Harvey). These strategies can instead be appreciated as visible engagements with the source text creativity. This engagement, which must bring about choices, already points to some differences between translation and creative writing: "the literary translator is under considerably more pressure [than the source text writer] to make the 'right choice'" (Nikolaou, "The Translator and the Poet," 22).

Naturally, translation is more than a willingness to engage with other languages and cultures, or an analysis or interpretation of a literary work written by someone else, "it offers the translator the opportunity to write his response to a text, to embody an experience of reading" (Scott, "Introduction," xi). Indeed, one of the more explicit

differences between creative writing and translation is the preexistence, in all its translatability, of a (published) source text as a point of departure. The blank page therefore exists as "the place of the translator's imagination," a "virtual space" (Scott, "Translation," 35) of possibilities, of movement, of transformations. And here lies one of the advantages, in my view, of translation: this reading experience, full of desire but also frustration. It is exactly from this particular form of "creative reading" of the source text that the translator begins his or her complex process of unlocking and handling the text. The translator becomes a privileged type of reader. This is not your average, however attentive, reading. It implies a form of reading which is unique to translation. This reading is unique exactly because it is "provoked by the necessity of the creation of new writing" (Bush 25); further, during the translation process, "[i]n the course of drafting and redrafting, the translator reads and rereads the words as written by the writer: the writing develops in close communication with those words" (Bush 25). It is a reading which has been described as "maniacal" (Parks), the "most intimate act" (Spivak 400), and consisting of an "emotional engagement" and "intensive contact" (Bush 27) with the other text:

> This initial phase is always and necessarily intertwined with that of writing, the transfer process, by which the tension between the translator's reading experience, the source poem textuality, and the expectations of a target readership, becomes verbalized into another language, not just into one's own native tongue, but one's own particular idiolect. (Loffredo and Perteghella, *One Poem*, 90)

Indeed, despite the preexistence of the source text for the translator, Peter Bush, academic and translator, sees a bond between the creative writer's reading of his or her own work and the literary translator's reading, both "expressed in a material form of words which, despite all the instabilities of idiolect, of historical and cultural change, provide a more than notional continuity and commonality in the writing" (25).

As in theater making, the translator becomes a "reader-practitioner," journeying in-between linguistic, semiotic, critical, creative, and cultural settings, sharing with actors the "aterritoriality of a reader-practitioner who simultaneously exists within the world of the text whilst plundering it for the potential resonances within the contours of a new target language and culture" (Johnston 13).

The reading experience embodies the important stage of unwrapping the source text, but also of reading ourselves in it, our lives, so that translation can also become "an autobiography of the reading self" (Scott, "Introduction," xii). This reading experience, while unique, starts the process of translation by tempting our literary memories and experiences (our previous experience of translation, of reading other texts) into the writing phase: "the richness of a particular translational reading opens up like a window, onto echoes of other work the translator has written or translated before, and these memories feed into the new version(s), the soon-to-happen rewriting" (Loffredo and Perteghella, *One Poem*, 90).

Both practicing translators, Bassnett and Bush point to another distinction in the working process of translation, that of numerous drafts, with Bassnett acknowledging that translating for her involves "consciously and deliberately working through several drafts," which does not happen in her other writing, when drafts are sparse, because the drafting process begins "internally before the practical writing stage begins" ("Writing and Translating," 178). Bush also highlights the importance of the drafting process in translation, of the "stages in a writing that is related to the multiple readings" of the text (27). This process of rewriting the text, of revision, of fluctuation, highlights movement and instability once again and, metaphorically, drafting can be understood as textual "rehearsals," where the different readings and annotations will eventually contribute to the text's performance. Yet, the idea of several drafts also opens up different, more intriguing possibilities: first, the ensuing corrections, alterations or restructurings in the drafts can be perceived as acts of self-writing, "whereby the 'self' writes and rewrites itself" (Loffredo and Perteghella, *One Poem*, 97); secondly, the linearity implied in the drafting process can instead give way to what Scott calls "a whole bundle of virtualities" ("Translation," 35), that is, the virtual spaces of reading which enact (different) possibilities on the blank page. This implies the existence of different versions of the source text in the mind of the translator, and these "virtualities" can be made manifest: rather than choosing one "final" version, all the different readings, with their changes and restructurings, can be made visible at once, offering the reader a complete experience of the textual possibilities "coexisting at the same time in the imaginative world of the source text" (Loffredo and Perteghella, *One Poem*, 97; see also Wright).

The Nature of Translation and Adaptation

The above premises originate from the belief that translation – specifically literary translation – is a creative writing process, where subjectivity, cultural awareness of the native and the foreign, and creativity all contribute to both the renewal and birth of text(s). Scott argues that while translation as a creative art is easily associated with the writer-translator, "we are confronted with a tangle of controversy when it comes to identifying and locating creativity in the conduct of the translator-translator" ("Introduction," ix). Translation has had historically, metaphorically and, most importantly, theoretically an uncomfortable ride. No one can argue that translation is not a writing practice (it does after all involve writing a foreign language text into another text). The problem, I suspect, is in the type of "practice" and in the type of "writing" that are still connoted by the word "translation" in the mind of practitioners. Bassnett talks of a "hegemonic distinction made between writing and translation" at some point in history, and the various factors that may have contributed to it: the advent of printing, and subsequently of copyrights, the development of ideas of original and authorship, and the relegation of translation as a language learning exercise in the classroom, which have "played a role in creating the idea of translation as somehow

less creative than other forms of writing, less original, and in an age that sets high value upon originality, consequently less important"("Writing and Translating," 173).

In particular, the precept of faithfulness, and the moral right to be faithful to the "authorial work," are imbued in codes of practice as well as contracts, in which translators are generally asked to produce a "faithful" translation. There is a sense, perhaps a danger, of "corrupting" the "authorial" intention seemingly contained in the source text when translating, which is linked to the perception of the task of the translator to be as neutral and transparent as possible. But this view negates two important issues: first, the reading experience brings about the enactment of interpretations, of possible renderings, of personal choices and responses to the text, as Scott has argued ("Introduction," xi); secondly, the translator, as a human being, is a site of subjectivity, culturality, and idiolect, and therefore cannot be absent from his or her products.

Further to the negative distinction from the "authorial" or "original" writing, and because of it, translation has therefore been branded "unfaithful" if it deviates from the source text, (and, as we shall see below, this has implications for adaptation, a "freer" form of translation); clumsy and faltering if it stays too close to it. These thoughts, in turn, imply the presence of a dichotomy where none should be: the source text, as creative, productive, "original" work, and the translation as secondary, reproductive, derivative work. Lori Chamberlain investigates this dichotomy in the historically and ideologically gendered metaphors of translations as unfaithful/beautiful wives (*les belles infidèles*), of foreign language texts as "captive women," and other similar metaphors and sitings of translation in past and contemporary theory (315): traditionally translation as product has been perceived as female, the activity of translation as reproductive, implying a narrative which sees "the relation between the value of production versus the value of reproduction" (322). The discourse on translation has therefore focused on the (unequal) relationship with its source text(s), and the complex notion of faithfulness only highlights further this particular relationship. And it is exactly these ideas of fidelity and faithfulness which still dominate, in one form or another, the discourse of translation: faithfulness to the sense of the text, to its meaning (what it is said), and/or to its form (how it is said), faithfulness to the text's effect on its readers. And by being also a historically sited concept, "faithfulness" has evolved: "Nowadays 'faithful' is often replaced with other concepts. For example, one speaks of 'similar response' or of 'equivalence,' whereby the demand for 'equivalence' affects both the semantic as well as the stylistic and functional area" (Stolt 68).

Translation has therefore come to be measured against the "original" text. The Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello explicitly parallels performance with "translation" too. Yet, his metaphor has negative connotations as he understands both as inferior to the "original" written playtext, and always unable to wholly express its meaning:

> The literary work is the drama . . . conceived and written by the poet: what is seen in the theater is not and cannot be anything but a scenic translation. So many actors and so many translations more or less faithful, more or less felicitous; but, like every translation, always and inevitably inferior to the original. (Pirandello quoted in Redmond 71)

Remarks such as Pirandello's signify a prejudiced disposition toward the primacy and authoritativeness of the written text confronted with the volatile, performative, translational text. Because of the perceived dominance of the source text, translation can also be seen as an economic risk by publishers (what gets translated and transmitted into a literary system is usually what has sold well or won prizes back home, and therefore a great amount of interesting work never gets translated). More perilously, the idea that "originality" and "creativity" are solely individual concepts is reinforced in current copyrights laws:

> Originality reflecting the creator's personality is an essential basis for esteem in a cultural system where authorship has become a kind of property which can be expressed in legal and, most importantly, in economic terms. Indebtedness to others is seen as a handicap which will decrease the value of a work which is then considered a copy of somebody else's original. Communal thinking has no place in our society. (Aaltonen 99)

The translator therefore is asked to enact the impossible role of the "objective transcriber" searching for equivalents. While the idea of originality as creative and individual still undoubtedly pervades both publishing and academia, this same idea has for some time been put under pressure by a specific critical thought which, by bringing into play the concept of "intertextuality," undermines the notion of the "original" and its author, and in so doing asserts that all writing is in fact translation. Mining the idea of "originality" as an impossibility because cultural and literary production always reworks existing material (Fischlin and Fortier 4), the postmodern stance, expounded in particular by Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, provides the critical framework in which creative writing and literary translation (and writers and translators) share the same predicament: "Texts do not occur out of nothing, but recur as altered forms of pre-existing texts – as intertexts; there are no origins and there is no closure, but an ongoing textual activity" (Loffredo and Perteghella, "Introduction", 4). From this postmodern perspective, a metaphorical post-mortem of the (dead) author ensues, meaning becomes always unstable, and power is finally given to the readers. Within this framework the role of the translator can be reappraised as a subjective (and subversive) participant, "as a creative agent, in the [text's] ongoing reinterpretation and enrichment" (Wright 147). Concepts of textual property, ownership and authorship should then be reviewed. Indeed, I wonder how long Western copyright laws can be sustainable in their current form, as they are put under pressure by technological progress, where the dissemination and (re)creation of texts happen so rapidly, where increasingly texts are produced collaboratively, and where translation playfully and experimentally blurs its own fictionalized distinction with "authorial" writing.

    With this in mind, the presence of several translations of the same source text (the hypothesis of the cohabitation of different readings in the mind of the translator, but also different translations of the same source text by different translators) has not so much to do with language being dynamic and past translations becoming outdated, but rather with "meaning' being 'continually deferred; meaning is impossible to

pinpoint and fix once and for all" (Wright 147). The existence of different translations or versions "is meant to relativize the very notion of definitive, final translation . . . The accumulation of these readings, for that is what translations are, constitutes the [after]life of a poem" (Joris 37, quoted in Loffredo and Perteghella, *One Poem*, 69). Further, these textual journeys of the text also highlight the performative force of translation itself, with the multiple readings of the source text, which ensures its continuum, but also the creation of essentially new texts. By undermining the notion of the author as the only agent operating in the text, by accepting the plurality of meaning within it, feminist translators acknowledge the importance of their own intervention in both the translation process and product, and therefore revise further the notion of fidelity: "for feminist translation, fidelity is to be directed toward neither the author nor the reader, but toward the writing project – a project in which both writer and translator participate" (Simon 2).

Another problematic issue, linked to perceived reader expectations, and to the fraught relationship to creative writers/source texts, is the (in)visibility of the translator, and the concomitant fluency and readability of the translation. For example, the translation scholar Lawrence Venuti (*Rethinking Translation*; *The Translator's Invisibility*; *The Scandals of Translation*) extensively discusses the issues of invisibility and fluency in translation as essentially a narcissistic discourse, carried out by the dominant (often imperialistic) culture through the practice of domestication. He terms this strategy "an ethnocentric violence" characterized by fluency and illusion of transparency, an illusion that the translation is not a "translation," but rather born with the receiving culture: the translator (and the translation) become "invisible," the cultural transfer is not stressed enough (or at all), and the values of the target culture are marked and embedded in the translated text. Foreignization, as opposed to domestication, disrupting fluency and resisting dominant discourse, becomes therefore a resistant (political and ideological) strategy against "an imperialistic domestication of a cultural other" (*Rethinking Translation*, 13). Feminist literary translators, reappropriating the notions of faithfulness and fidelity, "intervene" directly in the text, subverting/playing with the language, including adding puns and wordplays, creating neologisms, and using prefaces and footnotes as strategies of (political) visibility (von Flotow). The late feminist translator, writer and academic Barbara Godard understands translation as creative production, as both "performance" and "transformance," and therefore she makes herself visible within the text, disrupting the illusion of both transparency and fluency (90–91).

It can therefore be argued that the practice of producing multiple translations of the same text, be these part of the drafting process or decidedly different readings, can also be a strategy of visibility, above all to make the translational process visible. Multiple translations also "act out" the virtualities of the source text (Loffredo and Perteghella, *One Poem*, 97) and by so doing the "TT [target text] achieves its autonomy, not by turning away from the ST [source text], but by conceptualizing it . . . by treating it not as something recuperable from the TT, but as something which the TT is taking forward, *and only taking forward*" (Scott, "Translation," 42).

The negative view of the "invisible" translator spawns a series of other problems, of course, in particular for the status and recognition of the translator, as we shall see below. The argument pro and against (in)visibility, however, does not have to be binary, but can produce a (re)generative discourse. It can be argued that a translation cannot be totally domesticated or foreignized, but will negotiate between the two strategies at different points in the text, so that a "hybridity" (Johnston) always takes place. Likewise, a translator cannot be completely (in)visible in the text and its contexts of space and time, but there is a constant negotiation of his or her position within the text, in relation to it, to its history, its producer, what has come before. The metaphorics of translation and performance can be invoked again by understanding this negotiation as something enriching the target text. The reader-practitioner, the writer-translator, can be understood

> as an actor who performs in terms of the imperatives of the text, and who, by extending this performance to new audiences, produces work in which he or she is both visible and invisible – simultaneously subsumed into the text (actor as character, translator as reader) and an active agent of its recreation (actor as performer, translator as theatre-writer). (Johnston 17)

Translation is not just a linguistic, transformative process involving two language signs. As seen above, translations happen in particular cultural contexts and translators inhabit different geographical, social, political, and temporal contexts. Therefore the role of translation as a form of cultural mediation is also recognized. But is translation just about "bridging gaps" and understanding the other? Is its role solely to mediate or even facilitate communication between cultures? For Venuti, an acknowledgement of the foreign within the text is about restoring the balance of power derived by geopolitics. For feminist translators, operating within their own ethics, translation is about visibility and *difference*. The translator takes responsibility for the creation of meaning: "The conventional view of translation as a grandiose bridging of differences can thus be reviewed to acknowledge the fact that translation is about difference. And it often accentuates difference" (von Flotow 98).

For some years, a growing number of practitioners and scholars have been arguing for a redefinition of translation as a creative and critical writing practice, supporting a "creative" turn in both translation analysis and practice which attempts to highlight the creativity and subjectivity involved in such literary practice (for example, Scott, *Translating Rimbaud's Illuminations*; Bassnett and Bush *The Translator as Writer*; Loffredo and Perteghella, "Introduction"; *One Poem*), and above all to go back to the cultural position where a distinction among literary practices never existed, but also where the two activities conflated. This creativity is not limited to problem-solving skills, to negotiation skills, to balancing form and meaning, to enhancing ideas of equivalence, but rather looks at the translator (even the translator-translator) as a creative writer, an equal participant in the literary production of texts. So that "translation is revealed to be a privileged exploratory space in which many voices converge

and reshape each other. Whether the translator's or the author's, these voices become, in translation, performances or personae interrelated 'in' and 'by means' of the act of writing" (Loffredo and Perteghella, "Introduction," 7).

Of course, the critical and cultural stance that all writing is translation poses a problem of definition for the practice of adaptation. More specifically, this entails first an understanding of adaptation in relation to translation itself, secondly, in relation to the source text, and last in relation to its context of production. First of all, adaptation stipulates changes at various levels, and the term is often used by writers, adaptors, and critics to indicate an intergenre translation (from novel to play, for example), or an intersemiotic translation (from novel to film), even as *mise en scène* (from page to stage). Naturally, even the most "accurate" translations always produce changes. Indeed, I have argued elsewhere that adaptation poses problems of definition in relation to "translation" (Perteghella, "A Descriptive Framework"; "Adaptation"). If both translation and adaptation involve changes and transformation, adaptation is still reputed to be somehow more brazen and unabashed in its changes, for example employing additions, omissions, changes to setting or plot, changes to the structure of the text (Aaltonen 45). Adaptation seems therefore to signify a "freer" translation (in relation to a translation product which is somehow located closer to its source text). The diversity between these writing practices, I have maintained, is not so much "in the 'process' of writing, always an act of reworking material, and not so much in the final product, always an interpretation, but rather in the ways this product is subsequently perceived by its receivers" (Perteghella, "Adaptation," 56). On the one hand, adaptation, with its (often political) relocalization of the text into another culture or into a different sociotemporal context (for example, Tony Harrison's *Phaedra Britannica*, Frank McGuinness's *Peer Gynt*), is perceived as the most "unfaithful" act of all, appropriating, (manhandling or *woman*handling) the text; on the other hand, it can also be received as more "creative" than translation "proper" because of the status of the adaptor in the literary system (Nikolaou, "Notes," 23). The affinity with another author's voice often makes established writer-translators – such as Giuseppe Ungaretti, Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes, Tom Paulin, to name just a few poets who have engaged with translational practices – appropriators of texts that become "self-writing": "what we focus on as readers and critics in poet-translators are implied dialogues, the ways two subjectivities textually merge, match, interact. We expect to unearth the poets we think we know, and now perhaps can see more clearly, as they voice themselves *in translation*" (Nikolaou, "Notes," 23).

The idea of writers in conversation with each other is therefore reinforced and made visible in the practice of adaptation. Further, the adaptation itself comes to be perceived as "original" and is retranslated, readapted in turn – for example, Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* has itself been translated into various languages – until it is made into an indigenous text (Perteghella, "A Descriptive Framework"). The notion of the "classic" itself is reinforced when it is translated and adapted through time, invigorating its position within the literary canons, so that "there is no clear-cut

distinction between an original and a translation. Translations act as innovators and thus assume the role which in strong literatures would be reserved for native writing" (Aaltonen 62).

Another context where textual adaptation is routinely undertaken is in the field of international theater. In the translation of theater texts, "adaptation," "imitation," and "version" are used frequently, and the role played by the status of the translator is even more evident. In theater, a privileged position is not only awarded to established poets and playwrights, but also to translators who have become specialized translators or have worked with a director toward various successful productions (Perteghella, "A Descriptive Framework"). Some of these specialized translators tend to translate plays and playwrights from the past (Chekhov, Ibsen, Molière, Lorca, Racine, and also ancient Greek dramatists). This choice would enable them to make a name as an expert translator and to be involved in translating other plays from the same playwright. Of course, one can also do much more to playtexts which are not under copyright law anymore and therefore more open to substantial changes. Adaptation can, for example, involve a relocation, a reconfiguration of the play and its register, regionalisms, and setting, even a change in plot, a restructuring of scenes, due to theater conventions, such as the duration of the performance, but also to a political, aesthetic, or cultural appropriation by the playwright-translator, or by the director (Perteghella, "A Descriptive Framework"; "Adaptation").

The quality of "performability" of a translated play dominates the discourse of theater translation, and this is another problematic notion in itself. "Performability," often meaning "speakability," usually implies that translating for the stage is to translate for actors. Further, it can be used to justify certain adaptive strategies taken by theater translators at both textual and performance level to make the play more "accessible" to a certain (imagined, ideal?) audience (see, for example, Espasa). But there is another argument. The practice in Great Britain, for example, of commissioning famous (often monolingual) playwrights to rewrite a literal translation implies the importance of a certain (however vague) performability; "the claim is always that only a playwright can produce a 'performable' text out of someone else's translation" (Bassnett, "Translating for the Theatre," 76). The producer of the literal translation (often an annotated translation) rewritten by a famous (monolingual) playwright is seldom recognized in theater programs, and therefore invisible in the process and product of translation. Of course, literal translators not only provide an "accurate" translation, but also offer explanatory notes on historical, social and cultural reference and theater conventions into which the play was born, and when this process of explanation is carried over into the rehearsal room, for example providing a literal draft for a director or playwright to rewrite, the literal translator also becomes a consultant on both text and stage production (Rappaport). And I have also argued elsewhere how the literal translation must be considered the first draft of a writing process shared by multiple subjectivities, and therefore contributing to the final draft (the adaptation) of the playwright-translator (Perteghella, "A Descriptive Framework").

Translators as Writers

Who wrote the Milan Kundera you love? Answer: Michael Henry Heim. And what about the Orhan Pamuk you think is so smart? Maureen Freely. Or the imaginatively erudite Roberto Calasso? Well, that was me.

<div align="right">Tim Parks, writer and translator</div>

If translation can be (re)appropriated as a process of creative writing, then all translators *are* necessarily writers:

> The writer is a translator, but the translator is also a writer. The writer authors a text in a chosen language without a blueprint, while the translator uses the authored text as a blueprint to create the text in another language. Both author and translator achieve aesthetic fulfillment through the act of writing, and both hope that their respective texts will be read. (Lee 8–9)

The idea of translators as creative writers is central to the production of what is usually defined as literary translation. Translation of literary texts generally speaking encompasses all literary genres, from fiction to nonfiction writing such as biography, autobiography, and travel writing, from children's literature to drama, from poetry to graphic novels, and so forth. Translators would choose a particular genre (or more) to work with, and one can agree that one would have to have a certain "literary" disposition to undertake the translation of such texts. We have discussed above how the writer's self-imposed constraints positively produce creative responses by the translator (Boase-Beier and Holman). In the translation of poetry, rhyming schemes and meters, and their associated rhythm, as well as free verse, are just some of the issues the translator has to deal with, together with the translations of associative and figurative language, and the poem's own aurality and orality. In the translation of novels (but also nonfiction prose such as (auto)biographies and travel writing), repetition, metaphors and metonyms, iconicity, the distinct use of regionalized voices for certain characters, and borrowings and allusions would constitute creative constraints for the translator, challenged also by cultural presuppositions present in the text. In the translation of children's (and teen) literature, translators are also asked to engage with different types of registers, alliterations, onomatopoeia, and in most cases with the nonverbal text, pictures and illustrations, which complement and even add to the verbal text. In graphic novels and comic strips constraints of space are added in. Culture-bound language, the use of dialect and slang, characterization, different conventions of the stage, and the fraught notion of "performability," as discussed above, are some of the constraints for the translator working in the field of international drama and theater making. But is the understanding of literary translation, and what is "literary," really so uncomplicated? Is literary translation "literary" just because it engages with literary texts? Scott presents another view, that of not limiting the

idea of literariness only to the source and target texts, but of extending it to the process of translation itself, promoting translation as "a literary language":

> translation encourages us to explore formal transmogrification in such a way that forms are constantly put under new pressures and required to test their capacities and adaptabilities . . . translation should be the initiator of new forms, partly to avoid what is already culturally loaded, and overloaded, partly to create new spaces within the TL [target language] for a distinctive translational literature to establish itself. ("Introduction," xi)

This implies that translators are, and have been throughout history, innovators, bringing new forms of writing to their culture and language. Throughout the production of literature, they have instigated change (religious, political, literary, and cultural) through the works they have chosen to translate, to edit, even to censor; they have disseminated genres, forms, and ideas; to reduce translators to a neutral entity seems to me to be impossible at best, and unethical at worst. Despite the active and significant contribution of translators to our literatures, translators, in particular those who do not engage with other creative forms of writing, are often underpaid and invisible (for example, their names absent from book covers or theater programs) together with their work of translation (unmentioned in critical reviews of books), and their "disappearance" is perhaps even desired by some writers: "The translator should do his job and then disappear. The great, charismatic, creative writer wants to be all over the globe. And the last thing he wants to accept is that the majority of his readers are not really reading him" (Parks).

But it is not just source text writers who think invisibility, even if illusory, is the preferred position. Extremely visible translators (visible in their peers' recognition, their names published on book covers, even named in reviews, and recipients of literary translation prizes) often return to the ideas of invisibility and gendered metaphors of faithfulness in their self-reflective accounts of practice. Julie Rose, a recent translator of *Les Misérables*, in her own very visible Preface, likens her role to that of a faithful wife to Victor Hugo's text: "the relationship between translator and writer is very like a marriage. In this 'marriage' I wanted to be completely faithful. And I hope that the translation is more readable as a result" (xxxi). Anthea Bell, another celebrated translator, uses the analogy of "panes of glass," of translating as creating an illusion: "In presenting a foreign text in English I would wish it to pass the language barrier as if seen through that perfectly clear, transparent pane of glass, but I'm well aware that a translation resembles the pane with slight distortions" (59), and adds "I am an unrepentant, unreconstructed adherent of the school of invisibility." Yet, this desire for invisibility and faithfulness, no doubt here born out of love and awe for the work being translated, of being prudent rather than bold, is countermet by the fact that as translation and creative writing share the same processual nature, that translation is both a creative and critical practice, that the creative text depends on translation for its survival, translators then must share the same responsibility of the writer toward

their text, because this is, after all, the verbal embodiment of their own unique reading and response.

The ability to respond to the text provides a further development in the relationship between translator and text, translator and creative writer, that of entering into a "dialogue" (Loffredo and Perteghella, "Introduction," 8). The reading experience develops into the writerly phase, which performs "an unavoidable conversation, possibly full of tension, in which more than one subjectivity is at stake – the source text writer's as well as the target text writer's – and in which co-authoring is nothing other than the perceptible quality of multivocality" (Loffredo and Perteghella, *One Poem*, 14). The conflation of these voices, even of different narratives within the target text, necessarily makes the translator not just a "solo" writer, but a cowriter, and translation turns into a collaborative act a priori. By engaging with another writer's work and voice(s), the translator enters into a partnership and this seems to be a more democratic and egalitarian way of understanding the relationship between *translating* and *translated* writer. Of course, there is always tension, because of the need to negotiate meaning, and exactly because of the multiple subjectivities and culturalities that are brought together in the same space at the same time, all these converging perspectives (Loffredo and Perteghella, *One Poem*, 8; Perteghella, "A Descriptive Framework"). Collaboration is subsequently highlighted even more with the contribution of yet another subjectivity, that of the "reader": "The reader then is invited to explore further the new textual spaces opened by the translations, and, enticed to step onto this stage, to create new meanings" (Loffredo and Perteghella, *One Poem*, 25).

There are exciting new translation projects bringing forward translation as creative and performative writing practice. These projects understand the text not only as "intertext, the field of textuality," but as a "material object, the text in hand" (Worthen 11). The intersection of textual, aural, and visual, the accentuation of the multimodal is very apt for our contemporary age, which increasingly produces, and relies on, multimedia, often interactive, texts. These projects do not do away with ideas of faithfulness and equivalence altogether, but reenvisage them in light of translation as creative writing. These ideas "are revised so as to establish *to what* a translator is faithful, and to include, and account for, the creative input of the translator's subjectivity" (Loffredo 171). Equivalence, if it plays any role at all, should be understood as the attainment of a "literary" equivalent, a literary performance, no matter how (in which form) we arrive at that. Elise Aru, devising a new experimental approach to the translation of Surrealist texts, takes the metaphorics of translation as performance a step further. Her idea of faithfulness is to the context of creation of the source texts, where different practices, such automatism, collage, *cadavre exquis*, were used experimentally, and therefore recreated in her own "translation-objects," which also allude to and play with the interactions of Surrealist practices (writing, but also photography and art). Translated texts become here performances, not only in the metaphorical sense of the process: as translation-objects these are not only "read" but touched, explored, assembled, and composed by the reader-spectator. In the necessity of performing the translations, the reader-spectator becomes the audience who "assists" the actors (Brook 156),

who is requested to actively and physically to contribute to the "live show" of transla-
tion, to (inter)act, and become a performer too, therefore blurring even further the
liminal spaces between translation writing, making, and reading.

NOTES

The epigraph from Proust translates as "The func-
tion and the task of a writer are those of a
translator"; *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans

C.K. Scott Moncrieff, T. Kilmartin, and A.
Mayor (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books,
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14
Creative Writing and "the lash of criticism"

Steven Earnshaw

At its best there is a significant and dynamic interplay between the world of literature and the world of criticism. When this occurs both fields of writing display emotional, intellectual and aesthetic intelligence; the mutual desire for artistic excellence, insight and appreciation at such moments of coincidence becomes manifest. At their best, both creative writing and subsequent critical responses help further our broadest endeavor to imaginatively apprehend and express our understanding of the world and how we exist, have existed, and perhaps how we may exist differently.

Such a view may seem rather removed from the reality of contemporary criticism as it stands in relation to creative writing and creative writers, and willfully oblivious to the historical evidence. Rather than some miraculous fusion of terms, "creative writing and criticism" more obviously suggests an inherent antagonism, with all things "creative" a positive development, for there is self-evidently no such thing as "bad creativity," and criticism by definition a fairly negative activity, one that is always secondary to the act of creation, and in that sense, parasitic. It feels, therefore, that we have no choice but to take sides, or at least to have a preference for one or the other, for creative writing *or* criticism; and it also feels that to make a strong case for criticism is somehow to denigrate the prized human qualities of imagination and creativity, something that should not be done. Let me dive into the critical past and see if I can find a friend.

Taking Sides

In the history of criticism the argument that seems closest to the state of enjoined bliss I have outlined is Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Criticism* (1711). Through heroic couplets Pope persuades his readers of a necessary and symbiotic connection between the two forms of writing: "For wit and judgment often are at strife,/ Though meant each other's aid like man and wife" (ll. 82–83; in this context "wit" is the capacity to write poetry). This is reasonable, a perspective that sees writing and criticism as a beneficial marriage, a perspective that allows us to give due credit to two honorable professions. Unlike me, he observes that the relationship may be fraught, and of course, he is right, so I will change my mind on that point at least. What's more, the precepts of criticism as laid out are from a writer whose wit and whose judgment are both of the highest order, from a creative writer who can speak with the authority of having succeeded as a poet as well as a critic.

Yet despite my admiration for Pope's poem and its clarity on criticism, nagging at me is the Romantic idea that creative writing comes first, and that criticism is parasitic after all, feeding off creative outpourings without which there could be no criticism. It's the novelists, poets and dramatists who bravely offer up not just their work but themselves and their reputations. What right have critics to loftily pronounce judgment, damning in a few words, after an hour's deliberation (if that), what might have taken adventurers in creativity years to produce? The problem perhaps is that Pope, in his assertion of what makes good criticism, also lays down in his essay the law for what makes good art, and often in a way which would stifle the kind of art, the kind of creativity and imagination, we would want to encourage. For instance: "No single Parts unequally surprize;/ All comes united to th′ admiring Eyes;/ No monstrous Height, or Breadth, or Length appear;/ The Whole at once is Bold, and Regular." It's as if "wit" (creative writing) itself is subsumed by criticism, constrained by the same guidelines Pope suggests for criticism: Pope does not value the same type of creativity we would like because in the first half of the eighteenth century – the period where we might locate the origins of modern literary criticism – there is no significant value attached to it, if "creative" is understood in our modern sense to mean a combination of something like "original" and "imaginative."

With such quite unreasonable sentiments coursing through me, and now hoping to find a creative soul-mate, I turn to Rilke. Writing at the beginning of the twentieth century in reply to a young poet seeking his advice, Rilke declared: "I cannot discuss your verses; for any attempt at criticism would be foreign to me. Nothing touches a work of art so little as words of criticism" (Letter 1, February 17, 1903). That's more like it then: criticism exists in its own world, and the work of art remains impervious to all the arrows of criticism that come its way. Artists wring out of themselves from the depths of despair works of sheer beauty, of pure truth, works that can affect us at the most profound levels, levels of experience and response that cannot be accessed by criticism: the art will last, the criticism won't.

But I also think of Charlotte Brontë, chronologically sandwiched between Pope and Rilke. After the worldwide success of *Jane Eyre* in 1847, she struggled to write her next novel, *Shirley*, disturbed as she was by the deaths of her brother and sisters in close succession during that period. When she finally submitted the manuscript to her publishers in September 1849, she told them in the covering letter how she would wait for "the lash of criticism" that would surely follow: "I bend my head and expect in resignation what, <u>here</u>, I know I deserve – the lash of criticism – I shall wince when it falls – but not scream." Victorian critics held powerful positions through their influence in literary journals, journals which existed as the promoters and guarantors of right-thinking in matters of literary and cultural taste. Charlotte Brontë was writing at a time when she had no option but to concern herself with what the critics would say; writing under the name "Currer Bell," a gender-neutral pseudonym, was her attempt to get a fair hearing for an unknown female author. What she really objected to was *unfair* criticism, for she welcomed ("deserved") intelligent critical responses as an aid to developing her own writing, and took time to correspond with notable critics such as George Henry Lewes. So, sandwiched between Pope and Rilke is a view that suggests creative writing is the originary, passionate force, alongside which good criticism can prove a useful servant to writers. Between Pope and Rilke here is a writer engaged in personal expression – the legacy of Romanticism – and, at the same time as she expands the possibilities of the novel, willfully submitting to critical rigor – the strain of commentary that descends from the early eighteenth century. Masochistic stoicism aside, this surely is an attitude worth holding on to.

There have been other attempts to configure the coupling of creative and critical writing, ones which suggest to varying degrees that the separation is not as clear-cut as it may seem above. Rather than seek to define the nature of the linkage, they look to reconceive one or other of the activities. For instance, Matthew Arnold argued in 1867 that there was a creative aspect to critical writing and urged his readers to accept that criticism is a manifestation of the creative capacity, although we are still to agree that criticism is always secondary to creative literature (11). Nevertheless, having accepted the relatively subservient position for criticism he perhaps did more than any other writer to demonstrate how criticism, through an emphasis on its creative potential, could enlighten and move readers just as the primary literature upon which it passed judgment could. I would certainly subscribe to this aspect of Arnold's work: good criticism has to be infused with the creative. It's part of the idyllic state.

It might seem uncontentious of Arnold to remind the reader that the creative writing comes first and the criticism second since this is the natural temporal order. A novel is written and then it receives "the lash of criticism"; it can hardly elicit a critical response in advance of its having been written. It is this natural ordering which also supports the idea that no matter how much the activity of criticism might be elevated, such as Arnold would wish, criticism remains in a position of dependency, and is secondary in a more possibly pejorative sense of being "lesser."

Yet in his dialogue "The Critic as Artist," Oscar Wilde argues the reverse: "For it is the critical faculty that invents fresh forms. The tendency of creation is to repeat itself. It is to the critical instinct that we owe each new school that springs up, each new mould that art finds ready to its hand" (123). This is Wilde's habitual mode of producing a witticism, by turning a truism on its head, comic, half-serious at best, since a moment's thought will reinstate the temporal order of creative writing first, criticism second. But Wilde's duologue is a serious contribution to ideas about the possibility of criticism, with, among other things, the idea that collective critical endeavor is a prerequisite for quality art to flourish. This, too, is crucial to the idyllic state.

The above positions still keep the two elements of the creative-critical marriage distinct, but from the latter half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first there have been some forays into removing the troublesome hyphenated relation altogether and allowing or forcing the two realms into one indistinguishable entity. There are different ways of doing this. One is to take the view that writing is writing is writing. This might entail any of the following combinations: the creative is critical and the critical is creative, not just in the sense that Pope's *Essay on Criticism* is both poetry as criticism and criticism as poetry, since this would still allow a distinction, but that all writing is simultaneously creative and critical, the two cannot be separated out; all writing is interrelated and interdependent, "intertextual," and so all writing functions as "text," in the sense that all writing (again without distinction) is part of a global "text-ure" in which "critical" and "creative" (may) become meaningless terms. Jacques Derrida's *La carte postale*, 1980 (*The Postcard*), and *Glas*, 1986, are examples, and also overlap philosophy and creative writing; and "For the Etruscans" by the poet and critic Rachel Blau DuPlessis (1979–1980) is an example of a "nonstandard" essay cast in a creative-critical mode with the intention of undermining traditional, "masculine" academic writing. These are all arguments and instances from poststructural literary and critical theory which may not have much of a foothold in general perceptions of creative writing and criticism, for I would speculate that most people would either want to retain a sense that there is a space or activity that can be identified as critical, a "standing back" from a work of art or from art as a whole, even when contained *within* the work of art. But, as with Wilde's reversal of the natural order, I believe there is something worth considering for our creative-critical idyll, although results to date are not promising.

This shuttling between various standpoints has hopefully opened up an array of perspectives on creative writing and criticism. Let us try to push some of these views further within a more specifically current context. Such a strategy will lead us to brush up against wide-ranging issues within which creative writing and criticism find themselves involved, such as the purpose of art, the role of the intellectual, literary theory, and the nature of creativity. Before that, though, I'd just like to try out a thought experiment to do with criticism, with the aim of pulling together the ideas we've already seen into a more concerted apprehension of criticism, which in turn will help in addressing creative writing and criticism in the contemporary

cultural scene. The experiment I ask you to be involved in consists of two parts: first, to create a world without criticism, and then to imagine what that world would be like.

Where Is Criticism?

We can begin by removing all critical writing on literature from bookshelves, journals, magazines, and the digital ether. What we want to do is leave ourselves with nothing but the works of art alone – they will then be able to speak to us, untrammeled and unmediated by any critical voice. Our enjoyment of literature will not be marred by academic jargon, subjective opinions, or fingers on the zeitgeist, and we won't need to be anxious about whether we've understood what we've read, or whether we should be reading it in the first place. Let's destroy all critical cant in the culture sections of our newspapers, televisions and radios. We need to be careful to stamp out critical blogs as well. With all this criticism out of the way, which is surely most of it, we will have a clear line of sight to the literature we love – no self-aggrandizing, self-proclaimed authority will be able to stand in our way and tell us what to think or what it all means.

That seems simple enough. We need to be sure though that we have comprehensively deleted all critical comment. It sometimes appears that novelists, dramatists and poets venture into criticism, so we need to make sure that their critical writings disappear along with the rest of this leeching activity. It should likewise be easy enough since the criticism will identify itself as such in the criticism section of the library, bookshop or web-tab. Nevertheless, some writers do provide us with a greater challenge. Virginia Woolf began life as a literary reviewer and took essay writing seriously, and the critical work adds up to a fair amount of material we should dispose of. Goodbye to her *Common Reader*! A bit trickier perhaps is when those creative writers sneak in a Preface. Henry James is especially guilty – excision will have to be the job of a committed intern. Similar excision will be required for George Bernard Shaw, whose plays are merely an excuse for a Preface. Trickier still may be the comments creative writers are determined to put into their correspondence and which we might inadvertently encounter when relaxing. Woolf again: "the art of letter-writing is often the art of essay-writing in disguise." It seems a bit rich, really, authors getting in the critical way of their own works, especially when they're quite often the first to denounce the critics (when they've probably been on the receiving end). Creative writers should keep their analytic thoughts to themselves.

What or who does that leave? Surely we can ignore book groups, for instance? No, I don't think so – people can be quite severe in these fora, especially if they've had to endure a long book they didn't like suggested by Frank. Is this going too far? But we set out to remove *all* criticism. We must ban it even among our friends asking for recommendations; we must ban those elitist gatekeepers of literature who won't

take our first or last novels – agents, publishers, editors – and indeed we must ban the book-buying public from passing comment. No person and no grouping can be critical.

An exception might be made for *positive* appreciation? What if we approve of a novel, a poem, a play, or some hybrid form that includes pictures? That's not quite in the same vein as being "critical," is it?

I don't see why not – it's a passing of judgment on a work of literature, and must therefore be classified as criticism. If we are to get rid of all criticism, we need to get rid of praise as well, since it could color our judgment, or indeed be deemed unmerited praise, just as bad as unjustified negative criticism.

So nobody and nothing is to be a critic?

That's the idea.

Not even the writers themselves?

Not even creative writers. They are not even allowed to pass judgment on their own work, to think that what they have produced when they clock off in the middle of the afternoon is "good," since that would be symptomatic of a critical attitude. Our creative types are asked simply to write. You, me, the creative writers as readers – nothing more is to be demanded of us than to read. And that should lead automatically to the world without criticism, where no trashing takes place, where there is no ordering of literature into the high, low and middle brows, where difficult modern poetry can lie unread because nobody can trick us into admiring it, where nobody will feel ashamed for reading a holiday book when not on holiday, or for not having read the complete works of Shakespeare, Goethe and Dante. Creative writers, too, will be freed up, since they will no longer have to assess their own writing. Anything will do! And everybody who has a book in them – which is everybody, isn't it? – will produce a book on a par with everybody else's.

"The 'ordinary' reader, the living writer, the professional critic, the academic theorist, and the amateur scholar"

So, everybody has a critical opinion, and criticism cannot be avoided. We can go further and say that each work of literature exists intrinsically as a piece of criticism in its own right, since it will stand in critical relation to other works of literature. At the basic level, a critical response is really one that asks the question "Is the book any good?" and anyone can answer that. This may seem to trivialize the whole affair, but as I hope to show, deciding on the value of a work of literature is an activity of the highest order. But to say that criticism and critics are everywhere may not seem very helpful since the field becomes so vast and dispersed it becomes a wilderness. That is because there is one vital element missing from the discussion so far: value.

A piece of creative writing has different kinds of value for different kinds of reader and different reading constituencies. Julian Barnes writes:

> It is bad for a writer to become either the sole property of the general reader, or the private fiefdom of scholars. A writer is most usefully kept alive after death by a mixed diet of attention: from the "ordinary" reader, the living writer, the professional critic, the academic theorist, and the amateur scholar. Paradoxically, the greatest writers are often less intimidating to the outsider and the freelance.

If we apply this to living writers as well – and I see no reason not to – we see that the vitality of literature is nothing other than the circulation of what is valuable, what is worthy of "attention." There is no single key value which will do this, for books and writers are valuable (have vitality) in different ways for the different reading constituencies that Barnes identifies. Some of the values overlap, some may be specific to the readership (and individual readers), and these may vary over time according to the way those readerships are "organized" internally, where the organization might be formal, such as in professional criticism and academia, or informal, for example the circulation between friends of books worth reading, or between poets, novelists and dramatists themselves.

I realize that this may seem evasive. If value is everywhere, what's the difference from saying that "criticism is everywhere"? And isn't this moving away from creative writing to a focus solely on the "critical"? No, I don't think so, because both literature and its criticism are entangled *through* value in the way in which I demonstrated you cannot separate out the creative from the critical. Even readers who sit down determinedly to read a novel in a "noncritical" fashion, to enjoy it purely as an unselfconscious reading experience, are in fact making a critical judgment by privileging one kind of value ("enjoyment," "entertainment") over all others. It would be interesting to analyze further precisely what such readers regard as pure enjoyment, but presumably they would not thank us for the enquiry, since it would transform their reading experience into one that had an overtly critical dimension. Yet a comment such as "What I like about the Brontës is the way they write, the raw passion" functions as a critical expression, articulating an aesthetic preference ("the way they write") and a possible preference for highly charged emotional subject-matter. "The way they write" doesn't actually give us much detail about the stated aesthetic value (is it to do with language, characters, plotting?), and again it would be interesting to know more. The fact that the discussion is of "the Brontës" means that they have read some or all of the works of Charlotte, Emily and Anne (and, who knows, their brother Branwell and the father, Patrick, too?), so the judgment is certainly an informed one to that extent, and then as soon as the reader says "of course, Anne's not as good Emily or Charlotte" we're into a full-blown critical discussion. Hopefully someone will then chime in that we should read Emily's poetry if we like *Wuthering Heights*, at which point we may be talking into the early hours. And who knows, this gathering may include one of each of Barnes's reader-types, and so there will be some fascinating interplay between overlapping and conflicting critical opinions, all of which will serve to keep this literature, this creative writing, vital. An unread book is neither creative nor critical.

But we have wandered into another version of the idyll. It is quite possible that such characters in such a group would end up fighting among themselves. Accusations of ivory-tower snobbery ("ordinary reader" to academic theorist), point-scoring (living writer to professional critic) and elitism (everybody to everybody) will emerge in polite and not-so-polite language. Why should the ordinary reader listen to what the academic theorist has to say? – she or he talks in a language that is impenetrable to the ordinary reader. How can what a professional critic says have more authority than a creative practitioner? Just because the critic is paid doesn't prove anything other than the topsy-turveydom of the creative-critical divide (the living writer is struggling to make a living following poor sales of her last book). And the living, creative writer can turn on the reader who doesn't appreciate his or her work, claiming that the reader hasn't understood or tried hard enough. Here we are faced with the issue of value yet again. These various readers are brought together by a shared value (literature) and are at odds with each other over what the significant values of literature are. The creative writer is just as much a part of this matrix as anybody else. But, if this is about value, does one reader's view have greater worth than another's? And here we wander into the world of professional criticism.

Academics, Critics, Canons, and Public Spheres

I've already briefly alluded to the development of professional criticism as arising at the beginning of the eighteenth century. I would define "professionalization" as making an activity that had "amateur," unpaid status into a more structured, paid, formal activity. "Criticism" emerges from journals like *The Tatler* (1709), *The Spectator* (1711–1712) and Samuel Johnson's *The Rambler* (1750–1752), and subsequent literary/cultural critical publications, and it is in these publications that "the critical essay" and literary review develops. We should remember that in the eighteenth century the possible audience for critics and criticism is relatively small, but one of the important adjuncts to this development is that this activity is part of a movement away from aristocratic patronage to one where writing might pay for itself. Not only is criticism becoming a profession, but writing starts to present itself as a distinct career opportunity, rather than a sport engaged in by gentlemen of independent means. As we move into the nineteenth century, there is an increasingly literate public, mainly among the middle-class and certain sections of the working class(es), and journals such as *The Quarterly Review* (1809–1967), the *Edinburgh Review* (1809–1929) and *Blackwood's Magazine* (1817–1980) become significant. The childhoods of Emily, Jane, Anne and Branwell Brontë were filled with writing in imitation of the stories and essays in the latter, down to the production of advertisements in the same style, and experimentation with different narrative personae. As we have already seen, with Charlotte Brontë's anticipation of the "lash of criticism" to follow publication of *Shirley* (1849), these critical fora were immensely powerful, dictating taste in literary matters where once Addison, Steele and Johnson had dictated taste in middle-class

manners (and the two aren't always distinct). Matthew Arnold increasingly took on the mantle of foremost critic from the late 1850s up until the 1880s, and his literary criticism shaded into social criticism such that he could avow that "literature" was crucial to the progress of the Empire and the easing of class conflict. At the same time as a sense of social urgency becomes one of the measures for artistic appreciation in the nineteenth century, the place of "beauty" as the gold standard for the highest poetic achievement (or, in Keats's formulation, "beauty is truth, truth beauty") falls into disrepair.

Everything is interrelated here: creative writers and critics becoming professionals; the social role of criticism; the rise of the middle class and an increasingly literate general public; greater access to education for all classes and to reading matter; the centrality of literature for a middle class with recently acquired political power; the waning of aesthetics as the accepted means for evaluation. Hence, a critical opinion is something much more than one person offering a personal view: such essays, as well as treating the literature in hand seriously, may be seeking to place this in a broader context that will deal with politics, religion, science, whether the working classes should be educated, and the role of women in society. Critics at this juncture seemed to hold the world in their hands.

What happened? From the end of the nineteenth century right through to the present day a rise in a broadly democratic outlook has seen a concomitant falling away of automatic deference to authority, increasingly so since the 1960s (to suggest the most obvious decade). There is no longer an assumption that a paid professional is "right," an attitude that is not confined to humanities and the social sciences. The categories of reader that Barnes identifies exist now, as they existed in the nineteenth century, but the value allotted to each kind of reader is not a given. In a democracy of voices each voice counts the same. But, it might be argued, if all voices are the same, is that not a variation of the description that criticism is everywhere and thus valueless? Won't we be thrust back into the undifferentiated wilderness unless value operates at this level as well?

There is an additional narrative to the above one of decline in the value of critical activity, and this is the story of a perceived crisis in what is called "the public sphere." Related to this are at least two other elements pertinent to the discussion: a perceived decline in the prominence and cachet of "the public intellectual," and the role of "the literary canon" in education and the wider literary world.

The Public Sphere

"The public sphere" is a hypothesis put forward by Jürgen Habermas, and advances the notion that in the eighteenth century, with the advent of publications such as *The Spectator* and venues such as coffee houses and drinking establishments where such publications could be read by all classes, a "public sphere" was established which allowed for the free exchange of ideas. Such a sphere, so it is argued, was crucial to

the formation and success of liberal democracy. In such an environment a properly critical attitude can flourish, and, to use our terminology, "value" can be debated between people on an equal footing. According to this narrative (which is influential, if disputed) such a public sphere no longer exists, either in the same form, to the same extent, or at all. The point for us in our discussion is that the issues were agreed to have value, and that in some sense there was a consensus about what particular arguments were of value. It can be argued that no such consensus exists now, and that there is no space where people can meet on such an equal footing.

I'm not sure that this is accurate in quite this way, and that's partly because the description of the public sphere is flawed, existing more as an idealized concept than something that is historically accurate. To make an obvious point, it is hardly likely that women had equal access to the coffee house and the tavern as men did, and it is a moot point as to how far lower classes could engage with their social superiors. But such caveats serve to indicate that a public sphere is extant today, with improved access in some areas, but with access always skewed in one way or another by people, groups, alliances and institutions in or with power. That suggests, though, that what counts as "value" – whose criticism is to be considered as having most "value" – is a function of interest groups (academia; the government; large publishing houses; global media). That collection of readers sitting in a room is a version of the public sphere, but when shown in this light, we should perhaps envisage different weightings accorded to each. Yes, but the thing to do will be to identify what views we think are worthwhile, valid "weightings" for these readers, and taking into account "interestedness" which may derive from attachments (to social groups, employers).

At first sight, the figure who would seem best able to make such judgments would be the public intellectual. This is a person who is expert in his or her field or fields (not too many), and who can both communicate the complexities of the field(s) to a general audience via popular mass media, such as television and newspapers. The necessity for public intellectuals is that they can both inform a general public of what otherwise would remain obscure, and can engage with the public in a meaningful way on these matters such that the public has a sense of being "involved." The majority view is that there is a decline in the number of people filling this role, and that this is a bad thing since without a full, public engagement with matters of general social import, the well-being of society in all its various aspects is compromised. Put in such a way this goes hand-in-hand with the above discussion of a diminished public sphere.

These stories of perceived decline of rather abstracted social and cultural entities bring us back to what might offer a final word on literary value, the literary canon, since it is the place where literary value is most evidently contested. The existence of the literary canon vouchsafes that there is a body of literature which we can point to as the best literature that has been written, agreed to (in an ideal world) by Barnes's motley crew of interested parties. And, when the settling of the canon meets the needs of education, the best and the brightest creative writing should find its way onto the

curricula of schools, colleges and universities. Indeed, the canon has been the place where governments, teachers, writers and general readers have all had their say. And if no one continues to argue that literature is central to national identity and culture, as was the case in the nineteenth century, the fact that you are likely to have been taught Shakespeare in England, Goethe in Germany, and Dante in Italy at school level indicates that such mindsets continue.

But no such unassailable canon exists, and the politics of canon formation are labyrinthine. The professional critical realm certainly exists, in every one of those readers mentioned by Barnes with the exception of the "amateur scholar" and the "general reader," but the state of play in this realm has none of the virtues of a genuine public sphere (although it's arguable that anything could be such a thing) or credible public intellectuals. Wouldn't we be better going back to our personal constituencies and keeping our views either to ourselves, or at least among like-minded friends? I don't think so, for Wilde is the trump card: quality criticism is necessary for quality creative work. Just as there are good writers and bad ones, some critics offer more than others.

The Creative Work

Let's go back to the idea that we can do without criticism and look at this familiar poem from Emily Dickinson:

> Tell all the Truth but tell it slant –
> Success in Circuit lies
> Too bright for our infirm Delight
> The Truth's superb surprise
>
> As Lightning to the Children eased
> With explanation kind
> The Truth must dazzle gradually
> Or every man be blind –

The whole meaning of the poem seems to be given in the first line, so that the "meaning" of the poem would appear self-evident and the rest of the lines should support this opening statement. To look any closer than this might ruin the enjoyment?

Are the following seven lines a forthright elaboration or explanation of the first line? But why should that be necessary if the statement is self-evident? Perhaps I've assumed too much; after all, advising us to tell the truth "slant" seems a little devious at best. Perhaps then the poet must explain why the statement is necessary in the first place, and that explanation appears to be that if "all the Truth" is given in one go it

will be too much and the person will be blinded – hence the need for "slantness." In what sense "blinded" though? And why can't we "handle all the truth" in one go? And why is there no full stop? And what's a "Circuit," why isn't it "the Circuit" – is this clear to an American audience but not to an English one? Do all of these questions make the poem a poor poem because its meaning is not clear? It's about truth yet seems to obfuscate? Yet among all these questions the poem strikes me as a fantastic piece of art, for bringing together this particular jumble of ideas and images and this particular choice of words and tone gives the appearance of meaning, insight and beauty. It seems to me to be worth persevering with. So, should I really be trying to get at the truth of the poem "all in one go," especially when this is precisely what the poem warns against? Perhaps the meaning of the poem will gradually dawn on me. Yet how can something be "too bright" for "our infirm Delight"? Can brightness and delight be yoked together – they don't seem naturally twinned, that is, light intensity doesn't seem a feature of delight. On a logical level and experiential level it doesn't make sense. Yet at a level of "poetic truth," to me at least, it does, perhaps in the manner it asks me to hold together all of these different (and conflicting) ideas, images, words. But who can answer my questions, some of which may be the questions of other readers? And to be honest, "poetic truth" is not quite a good enough response for me – I could do with something a little more tangible, more substantial.

My next reaction is to think that Emily Dickinson herself might have commented on it, so I could go to the source. Yet if she's going to insist on telling me all her truth slant, I'm probably wasting my time, even if she *has* given us a commentary. Another option is to ask persons more knowledgeable about poetry and Emily Dickinson, not with the attitude that they will give me a definitive answer, "the truth," but that they will shed light on it for me to further consider (but how much light will I be able to bear?). These other persons who can tell me about the poem are, when doing this, adopting an *informed* critical position. As a reader interested in the poem and wanting to take it further I am also adopting a critical position. "Critical" not necessarily in the sense "critical of," but "critical with," I am a critic "with the poem."

But isn't this just a particular kind of art, a particular kind of poem that uses simple language in complicated ways, opening out into a kind of sophistication that requires close critical attention? Other poetry, other art takes a more straightforward line (not slant)? Well, yes, but it might also be worthwhile, of value, deliberating on that as well. The truth is, it depends how much you want to get out of a piece of literature, a piece of art. If a work of art stirs you up, you can leave it at that or you can take your engagement deeper. How and if you take it further will depend on personal circumstances (are you stealing time at work to read it? or are you studying it at school? in higher education? did somebody recommend it on a Dickinson fan-page? will you go to a "student guide"?). And just as there are different levels of engagement, each with their own values, there are different levels of insight on offer, each with their own value. The way I've responded to the poem is one which does appreci-

ate complexity, the tangential, and a poetry with a philosophical bent, and as such no doubt reflects my personal taste. But I'm certainly open to other kinds of poem, and other kinds of critical response. The point here is that, again, the creative writing and the criticism are *necessarily* entangled, and that the critical aspect can take different values, and offer differently valued appreciations or negative commentary. An informed response has a particular value, which may be of value to others.

The Writer, the Reader, the Critic

Yet there may be a lingering doubt that criticism gets in the way of the literature. Specifically, sometimes the notion of unmediated reading suggests a direct connection between the authors and their readers, with an extra level of enjoyment or appreciation from the feeling that the author is speaking directly to the reader. Such a perception might be enhanced by knowing biographical details of authors and reading literature alongside the background of their lives. In such a mode of reading, to introduce a critical perspective would seem to intrude upon the direct connection, and also be counter to the feeling that creative writers themselves would like to reach out to their readers without having to be subject to critical intervention.

All of this may be absolutely true for certain writers and readers. Such an arrangement will evince certain values about what literature is for (perhaps it is just for entertainment, that is, if it has to be "for" anything at all). Some writers write without conceiving of their audience, either because there is no way they could know who they are writing for, or because it would be an unwanted influence on what they might write. But other creative writers intervene "critically" to shape the reading of their work, in a way which is certainly analogous to that of the professional critic writing a literary review or an academic article. For instance, the epigraph to Virginia Woolf's essays collected in *The Common Reader* (two volumes) reveals the origins of the title and the theme of the series:

> "I rejoice to concur with the common reader; for by the common sense of readers, uncorrupted by literary prejudices, after all the refinements of subtilty and the dogmatism of learning, must be generally decided all claim to poetical honours." – DR. JOHNSON, *Life of Gray*

This is an apparent assertion of the primacy of unmediated reading, of the general (common) reader who enjoys a work of literature "uncorrupted by literary prejudices" (criticism). The opening to "How Should One Read a Book?", the final essay of the second volume, reiterates this idea, advising the reader not to heed anybody's advice with respect to how to read a novel, yet Woolf then proceeds to guide the reader round to precisely the opposite viewpoint. At first it is not evident that this is what she is doing, for she fully takes the side of the common reader. Reading is difficult

to do properly, she tells us, and the temptation might be to hand the activity over to a critic. However, our intimacy with the literature means that we cannot tolerate a third presence. Hence, we are thrown back on ourselves. Yet, with time, we might develop "taste": "Thus, with our taste to guide us, we shall venture beyond the particular book in search of qualities that group books together; we shall give them names and thus frame a rule that brings order into our perceptions. We shall gain a further and a rarer pleasure from that discrimination." Thus far, the common readers are masters of their reading domains. Then she drops this bombshell:

> now at last, in order to steady ourselves in this difficult attempt, it may be well to turn to the very rare writers who are able to enlighten us upon literature as an art. Coleridge and Dryden and Johnson, in their considered criticism, the poets and novelists themselves in their considered sayings, are often surprisingly relevant; they light up and solidify the vague ideas that have been tumbling in the misty depths of our minds. But they are only able to help us if we come to them laden with questions and suggestions won honestly in the course of our own reading. They can do nothing for us if we herd ourselves under their authority and lie down like sheep in the shade of a hedge. We can only understand their ruling when it comes in conflict with our own and vanquishes it.

And Woolf continues, saying that art is complex, and that a lifetime of reading will not be sufficient. Nevertheless, as readers, we have a responsibility and our views will contribute to a general atmosphere which will inevitably have its effect on writers. This is Pope's creative-critical marriage transposed into the twentieth century, with responsibilities to be critics falling on all readers, and the necessity to value the writing of professional critics (and writers as critics) who deserve to be valued, in order that creative writing itself can prosper, much as Wilde suggests that only if there is a properly prepared ground can creative writing avoid being trite.

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15

But What's Really at Stake for the Barbarian Warrior? Developing a Pedagogy for Paraliterature

Jeffrey S. Chapman

Every time I teach creative writing I ask my students to fill out a cue card on the first day with their names, favorite authors, books they are reading at the moment, and three questions about writing they would like answered by the end of the semester. I do it mostly to learn a little about the students, but I'm also interested in what early writers want to know about the writing life. They are curious about all the normal things: writer's block and inspiration, craft and voice. And many of them want to know about publishing: "How do I go about publishing my novel?" "How do I find an agent?"

This is at the same time utterly natural and utterly ludicrous. It makes sense that they ask why they would write if they're not going to publish? Am I just doing this for fun? For myself? Is it just a hobby? On the other hand, there's something unwise about starting a course of study already focusing on the end prize. If one signs up for piano lessons, one doesn't ask on the first day how to get a record deal or when one is to play Carnegie Hall. At the first practice of little league soccer, one doesn't ask about the English Premier League. Are these beginning writers engaged in a perfectly normal ambition or is there something about writing that allows for delusions of grandeur? I find myself thinking of the television show *American Idol*: there are some very talented singers who try out for the show, but there are also some supremely untalented ones, and they all seem to believe they have what it takes to be the next great pop star. Even the most tone-deaf believe in their capacity to be famous. Not that my students are the literary equivalent of tone-deaf, but they are at the beginning of their writing careers.

They don't want to *write*; they want to be *writers*. Authors. They want to publish. Moreover, they want to publish well. Many of my students secretly harbor dreams of being the next J.K. Rowling or E.L. James or Stephenie Meyer to burst onto the scene. And is that too much to want? Wouldn't we all like to become famous for our books, become rich on our books, sell the rights to our books to Hollywood, become a household name? Literary ideals are fine, but my students aren't really looking to be the next Ben Marcus or Lydia Davis, brilliant but obscure outside a particular literary circle. When they ask about publishing, they aren't for the most part asking about the small literary journals, the *Hayden's Ferry Review* or *Tin House*. Many of them come into my class writing fantasy or horror or science fiction.[1] They want novels with fancy covers. They want books that will greet people at the front of a bookstore, or piled up in the hundreds on the tables of a Costco or Sam's Club. They want books that are read by masses of people. Not all beginning students lean in this direction, but many do. They want to write mass-market fiction.

Creative writing in the academy and mass-market fiction are an uneasy fit. With all of our injunctions against formulaic and clichéd fiction, what do we do with a vampire-versus-werewolf story or dark urban fantasy? Many teachers shy away entirely and don't allow students to turn in genre fiction. Others allow it, but try to push it away from formula. My colleague allows genre fiction but requires it to be "character-driven" fiction. I mention this stipulation to my students and they ask me what that means. I ask them, "Why does James Bond save the world again and again?"

They think about it for a second. "There's no real reason. It's what he's supposed to do. He's James Bond."

"Absolutely," I say. We don't question James Bond's motivation. He does what he's supposed to do. He isn't a real person; he's a cut-out. His actions arise out of his essence, his fundamental superheroism, not from his psychology. The same can be said about his enemies. We don't question why Goldfinger or Dr No want to take over the world. They are evil. That's what they are *supposed* to do. And that's fine. It leads to exciting adventure. But character-driven fiction is asking for the character's actions to arise from some sense of psychology or internal motivation, not because of the character's type. A barbarian warrior will likely become boring if all his actions derive from him being a barbarian warrior. If your hard-boiled private eye acts like all other hard-boiled private eyes, why will we be interested? How can you make a character into a unique individual with a unique inner life such that her actions are a reflection of who she is and what she wants?

I think this is a fine thing to ask of students who want to write genre fiction. If nothing else it teaches students to individualize characters so that not every elf is the same as every other elf and not every romantic heroine is the same as every other romantic heroine. Nonetheless, it is privileging a certain fictional aesthetic: psychological realism. And not all fiction is psychological realism, nor should it be. James Bond movies are fabulous fun partly because we know so clearly who 007 is and what we can expect him to do next.

Can we, as professors in the academy, really expect students to privilege Jamesian psychological realism over any other aesthetic? Or the dirty realism of Raymond Carver? Or any other aesthetic? Is it our job gently (or not gently) to nudge our students away from the mass market and toward literary fiction? To return to *American Idol* for a moment, we don't try to make those contestants into classical opera singers. Kelly Clarkson is a great pop singer, and we're happy with that. Why do we try to reshape our young writers? Why don't we just allow them to write mass-market fiction? Because we don't exactly know *how* to help them become better mass-market writers; to some degree that's because we don't know what makes better or worse mass-market writing. Can we evaluate it using the same tools that we use to evaluate literary fiction, the tools that we teach our students and which form the vocabulary of the creative writing workshop?

Before I can address that question, I want to define my terms. What do we really mean when we talk about mass-market fiction? The term is complicated because it has material, economic and aesthetic implications that are all separate but interrelated. We are talking at the same time about a book format – the mass-market paperback (and mass-market hardcover to a lesser degree) – and a type of fiction. Mass-market literature and genre fiction are often used as interchangeable terms, but it's worthwhile not to confuse them.

We can start to think about mass-market fiction as a function of distribution: books sold through a mass market like a drugstore or supermarket rather than a direct market like a bookstore, brick-and-mortar or online. If a mass-market paperback doesn't sell, the store tears the cover off and sends it back to the publisher for a refund or credit toward future purchases; the book itself is supposed to get trashed. In this mass market, paperbacks are similar to magazines, where that model makes a bit more sense: many topical magazines lose their relevance and value within a week or month after publication so there's no reason to preserve them. The implicit argument is that the half-life of mass-market paperbacks is short: if they don't sell right away, they probably will never sell. They are ephemeral rather than enduring. It's not worth it to the publishers to have them shipped back. Direct market merchants are responsible for the merchandise. If a book doesn't sell, the merchant is stuck with it. The stock thus tends to privilege books with legs, books that will continue to sell well for longer. It's a reasonable bet that Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* will still be selling consistently ten years from now.

We can also describe it in terms of economics. Mass-market paperbacks are significantly cheaper than their trade paperback counterparts. The price is related to the materials. Mass-market paperbacks have a smaller format: roughly 4 by 7 inches as opposed to 5 by 8 inches for trade paperbacks. Conceptually you can slip a mass-market paperback in your pocket – thus the term pocketbook – but that works better with a slim Harlequin romance than with a 600-page Tom Clancy thriller. The paper used in these paperbacks is cheaper and the print is packed tighter on the page.

All of these factors are ultimately connected. Pocketbooks, like magazines, are designed to be disposable. We tear through them quickly. They are page-turners. They are plot and action oriented. Literary fiction has migrated, by and large, to the larger trade paperback format. Better paper and higher-quality covers are designed to last longer, to be placed on a bookshelf where they will impress dinner guests for years to come. The material form and the content and the space in which we encounter them all help construct the social object that is literature (and the social objects that *aren't* literature).

The material nature of the mass-market pocketbook reminds us – in every aspect – that this is literature meant to be read and enjoyed fiercely and then moved past. It is fast and immediate. When Penguin started the paperback revolution in 1935 in order to make contemporary literature convenient and easily available to the masses, they published Agatha Christie alongside Ernest Hemingway. Today pocketbooks tend to be genre fiction. And while it is tempting to conflate mass-market fiction with genre fiction – indeed they are often interchangeable – I have reservations about the term genre fiction. I think it is used pejoratively by the literary fiction camp to suggest lowbrow and unsophisticated writing (while the genre camp dismisses literary fiction as boring and elitist). It also suggests that literary fiction is something other than a genre, or a collection of genres.[2] It's not hard to argue that the rules that define literary fiction are as discernable (or mysterious) as those defining fantasy.

Let me follow Samuel R. Delany's lead and substitute instead a much more useful term, invented by theorist Fredric Jameson: paraliterature. Jameson wrote, in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, about postmodernism's desire to efface the "frontier between high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture":

> The postmodernisms have, in fact, been fascinated precisely by this whole "degraded" landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and *Reader's Digest* culture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and the grade-B Hollywood film, of so-called paraliterature, with its airport paperback categories of the gothic and the romance, the popular biography, the murder mystery, and the science-fiction or fantasy novel: materials they no longer simply "quote," as a Joyce or a Mahler might have done, but incorporate into their very substance. (3)

As opposed to the stigmatized term genre literature, paraliterature recognizes mass-market literature as something other than "literature," but doesn't attach a judgment to that otherness.

The mass of literary conversations (both social and academic) through history has created an identifiable canon; if "literary" quality is not definable, then at least it's recognizable. It's like an electron: we can never pinpoint exactly where it will be, but we can describe a region of probability density, an orbit where the electron is most likely to be. We may not know exactly where it is, but we can say with certainty where it is not. Similarly, we can't pinpoint what makes something literary, but we have a sense of the literary map. If we argue about what's in the canon, we certainly

know what is not. Paraliterature is all the literature that sits at the edges of this cloud, at the same time helping to define the literary and also pushing against it, poking it, prodding it, sometimes making its way into the center, usually not. As Delany writes, "paraliterature is best described as those texts which the most uncritical literary reader would describe as 'just not literature': Comic books, mysteries, westerns, science fiction, pornography, greeting card verse, newspaper reports, academic criticism, advertising texts, movie and TV scripts, popular song lyrics" (210).

I grew up in the paraliterary world.[3] I always had a particular inkling for fantasy novels. Because we didn't have a television, my dad would read to my two older sisters and me after dinner. He read J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* and Richard Adams's *Watership Down*. I'm still a sucker for a good quest narrative. In high school I tore through stacks of cheap novels. The Salt Lake City public library held a biannual book sale where, on the last day, you paid $4 for as many books as you could cram into a paper grocery bag. The books were the dregs of the sale: the books that hadn't sold for 1 dollar the first day or 50 cents the second day. I didn't care. I would load up on space operas and quest fantasies, stack them up next to my bed, and go at it.

But as much as I loved these cheap books with their fantasy-art covers by Frank Frazetta and Boris Vallejo, I haven't kept up reading fantasy. I suppose the germ is still there, morphed into related literary interests: myth and folklore; Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; the magical realism of Garcia Marquez and Allende; the surrealism of Calvino, Borges, and Murakami. And I sometimes still find time for a fantasy novel. I recently got hooked on George R.R. Martin's fabulous series *A Song of Ice and Fire*. My real passion was, and is, for comics. Comic books are where I swerve fully into the paraliterary and where I hope to illuminate part of the conflict inherent in paraliterature: the tension between generic demands and literary demands.

I've never been a *truly* hardcore comics fan. I don't have thousands of comics sealed away pneumatically. I don't argue about who would win in a fight between the Hulk and Superman (though I would argue for the Hulk). I've never worn a Green Lantern shirt (though I would if one were given to me). I'm not *that* comics guy. At least I think I'm not, but maybe every comics guy thinks he's not *that* comics guy. Nonetheless, comics have played an important role in several phases of my life. They have been central to my development as a reader and writer, now more than ever as I am writing and illustrating my first graphic novel. I don't have thousands of comics archived in boxes, but I do have bookshelf after bookshelf *filled* with graphic novels. I may not be *that* comics guy, but I am his close cousin. Young me embraced the paraliterary aspects of comics with gusto. As a child I read comics with abandon. I devoured them. I loved the combination of images and language. I am still fascinated with the juxtaposition of image and text, and the possibilities the dual tracks open up, but now I approach it as a theorist and a creator. Adult me, having filtered down through a B.A. in English, an M.F.A. in creative writing, and a Ph.D. in creative writing and literature, thinks about how comics can be more literary. In these two

phases I can see the tension that faces paraliterature when we try to navigate into territory traditionally dominated by literature.

In 1981, when I was seven, I kept all of my comics in a box. The box had once held that great dot matrix printer paper of the 1970s – oversized with thick green and white bars, perforated edges with holes to advance it through the printer. This was the paper that my older sisters and I would draw on while my dad read to us after dinner. The repurposed box seems important to me now not only because it was the locus of my early comic fandom, but also because it was *not* meant for comics. Years later I would learn to store comics in a proper storage box (for anyone in the comics world, these long, thin boxes are ubiquitous) and this early one stands in contrast. It did the opposite of preserve the comics. It jumbled them together in a pile. They were sad artifacts: tattered, wilted pages and torn covers, if any cover at all.

But at that point in time and at that point in my life comics weren't *meant* to be preserved. I read those comics over and over. Superman's pal Jimmy Olsen. Archie and the rest of the Riverdale crew. Carl Bark's brilliant Uncle Scrooge comics, in which the ever-greedy duck patriarch solves the mystery of the hound of the *Whisker*villes or takes on the phantom of Notre *Duck*, always returning home to swim in his amassed wealth. I don't know where most of the comics came from; maybe my older sisters bought them before becoming more interested in ABBA and Queen. I didn't care. I just read them assiduously and added to them when I could. In the summer I would walk once a week down the hill half a mile to the nearest 7–11. My allowance was small but I could afford a Slurpee and one or two comic book floppies. A floppy is the thin, 32-page book that most people associate with comics. There were a couple of spinner racks of them next to the magazine rack. Once home I would read the new books twice and then toss them into the box. They would soon become as grubby as the rest. There was no effort to preserve them. A comic without a cover was as good as a comic with one. If anything, the best comics were the shabbiest because they were read over and over. This is what I knew: comics belonged in a box, comics were meant to be read. Comics were cheap and fun. There was nothing precious about either the stories or the objects.

That box of comics is long gone. That's fine. There was only sentimental value to those comics. My disinterest in condition reflects the roots of comics as a medium for children, but by the early 1980s this was already changing. Comics were becoming dominated by collectors. Starting in the 1970s, the distribution system of comics began to move away from convenience stores, drugstores and newsstands. A strong fandom was developing, based on the fan culture of science fiction. The growth of comic book sales in 1960s head shops led to the birth of specialty comic book shops and what we call the direct market. Specialty shops began bypassing distributers and buying directly from the publishers. Comic book shops exploded in the 1980s: "by the end of that decade, there were estimated to be roughly 400 in Britain and 4,000 in America" (Sabin 157).

The direct market changed how we accessed comics and who had access to them. The direct market sold directly to the most hardcore fans and bypassed the casual fans

who would traditionally buy a comic on impulse while shopping for other things (Hatfield 24). While this risks oversimplifying the process, by the 1980s, children were being replaced by a middle-aged audience as the primary purchaser of comics: this older audience had grown up reading comics; they possessed disposable income; they wanted copies of comics they had read growing up; and now they had, in the specialty stores, a venue to buy and swap old comics. But because most kids were like me – reading and trashing their comics – very few older comics remained in mint condition. The few that did quickly shot up in value. *Action Comics #1* (the first appearance of Superman) and *Detective Comics #27* (the first appearance of Batman) have both sold for millions of dollars in recent years. Many others have sold for hundreds of thousands.

Collectors saw an investment opportunity. Comics would be their retirement fund. People started buying two of every book, one to read and one to put *directly* into a Mylar bag backed with cardboard and logged in an archival box because, as I remember being told by a comic shop clerk, every touch reduces the value of a comic. For a while, the comics companies realized that they could capitalize on the collecting boom by selling multiple versions of the same comic with different collectable covers. True collectors wanted multiples of each.

It was during this renaissance that I had my second venture into comics. By 1987 I had more or less forgotten my childhood comics. I neither cared for nor disliked comics. Two titles pulled me back in: *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (*TMNT*) and *X-Men*. Both were huge at the time, and rightfully so. They were incredible comics. My cousin gave me a copy of *TMNT* to read and I was immediately hooked. This was long before the television show or movies had made *TMNT* a household name (and a dumbed-down property compared to the original). *TMNT* was independently published by Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird and was everything good about that independent era: creative, funny, exciting, with compelling characters. It was also black and white, low-tech, and immediate. *X-Men*, by contrast, was the consummate Marvel comic. Slick art, nice coloring, powerful characters (Wolverine, Phoenix, Rogue). What really distinguished the X-Men in the 1980s, however, was the writing of Chris Claremont. He made the heroes – who gained their superpowers through genetic mutation rather than alien birth or exposure to a gamma-ray blast – into teenagers who grapple with their identity like any teenager does. Mutant powers were not necessarily good. The characters were persecuted by society for being different, sometimes freakishly so, and so the mutants became a metaphor for difference: race, appearance, gender, sexuality. We teenagers could all find some solace in the monthly melodrama of Professor Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters.

Every month I bought these two floppies and a few others if I had extra money. At first I just bought them and tossed them aside when I was done reading, like I did when I was younger, but soon I realized that I was doing it wrong. I was foregoing a future fortune with my jejune habits. So I bought bags, backing boards, and a storage box, and started storing them properly. Everyone around me was doing it. Sometimes I even bought two copies of a memorable story. This was great for the comics business

– the industry went through a huge boom in the late 1980s and early 1990s – but not actually the investment bonanza people imagined. There's a big difference between a comic from the 1930s read primarily by children and a comic from the 1990s bought and preserved by adult collectors. It's estimated that there are fewer than 100 copies of *Action Comics #1*. Who knows how many perfectly mint copies of 1991's *X-Men #1* there are, with each of its five variant covers? Because of the speculative frenzy, 8 million copies of that comic sold. Twenty years later they sell for about a dollar, less than the cover price.

That speculative frenzy changed comics. The publishers realized they were now selling more to adults with real money than to kids with allowances. They started printing on high-quality paper that held color better than newsprint and, more importantly for the collectors, would stand up to time better. They also started writing stories for adults. Comics got darker, grittier, sexier, more violent. They raised the prices because for a while there was limitless demand. People would buy anything. Today, a comic book usually costs $3.99, almost as much as a paperback. If you read multiple titles every month, it becomes an expensive habit. Children have, for the most part, been priced out of the game.

I won't say that's a bad thing or a good thing. But it is a thing. Comics have changed over the past 30 years. And in order to properly understand comics, we have to consider the entire system. As I argued about mass-market paperbacks earlier, the material product of the comic book, the distribution mechanism, the audience, the economics, and the content are all wrapped up in one another.[4] But at the time it had the effect of pushing me out of comics. My love of the form couldn't keep up with the price of the hobby. I bought every *TMNT* and *X-Men* title, as well as some ancillary titles like *X-Factor* and *The New Mutants*, for two years and then it got to be too much money and not enough fun. Collecting is a much colder passion than reading.

My third foray into the world of comics happened more than a decade later, when I was in my thirties. I was a Ph.D. student in creative writing at the University of Utah and I started thinking about the possibility of writing stories in graphic form. I was taking a fiction workshop with Karen Brennan, a remarkable writer and risk-taker, who was open to (and excited by) any such experimentation. I started turning in a combination of comics and short-short stories. Not only was I tapping into my long-buried love for comics, I was reengaging with art. In high school I had planned on pursuing art in college; but once I got to university I wandered into writing and stayed there. I drew and painted a lot in high school and continued to keep a sketchbook all along, even after my interests shifted to fiction. Comics seemed like an opportunity to reinvest myself in my prior passion. If I wasn't as well trained or polished an artist as the comic creators coming out of art school, I figured I had an advantage when it came to the writing.

As luck would have it, comics were (and are) experiencing a revival. After the speculation bubble of the 1990s, after the industry had changed irreversibly, and after people realized that they were *never* going to get rich on these books, the market collapsed. Comic-book shops shut down left and right. Publishing companies folded.

Distributors closed up shop. Now there is only one distributor, with a monopoly on the industry: virtually all comic book sales go through Diamond Comic Distributors, Inc. The late 1990s and early 2000s were a rough time, financially and creatively. On top of this, comic companies now had to grapple with an aging readership. How would they appeal to this dedicated fanbase while still drawing in new readers (Hatfield 31)?

Despite all this turmoil in the mainstream comics, this decade also witnessed the remarkable growth of the graphic novel: comics published in book format, meant to be displayed in a bookcase. Some graphic novels repackage mainstream comics – this popular Spiderman story or that classic era of the Justice League – but many are original works of literary fiction. Creators who grew up reading the alternative comix of the 1960s and 1970s – Art Crumb, Harvey Pekar, Trina Robbins – and the independent comics of the 1980s and 1990s – Eastman and Laird, Dave Sim, Gilbert and Jaime Hernandez – started writing exciting graphic works. Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, a memoir about his father's survival of the Holocaust, set the stage (and the standard) for serious literary graphic literature. In 1992 it received a Special Pulitzer Award in Letters. Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* was *Time* magazine's Best Book of 2008. Gene Yang's *American Born Chinese* was the first graphic novel to be a finalist for the National Book Award in 2006. David Small's *Stitches* was also a finalist for the National Book Award in 2009. Chris Ware, Adrian Tomine, and Ivan Brunetti are frequent contributors to the *New Yorker*. Can we say that graphic novels are finding their way past the boundaries of paraliterature into the realm of the literary?

In my early comics fandom, I see one potential relationship to paraliterature. Call it innocent or naive. It was a passionate embrace of everything that comics were. I loved the feel and smell of the cheap newsprint. I loved the advertisements for x-ray glasses and sea monkeys. I loved the superhero's monthly clash with the supervillain, and I never worried that these stories were redundant, repetitive, or boring. Clearly they weren't; they bore up to reading and rereading. This is the fandom that embraces all that is comics.

I'm now positioned within academia, a professor of creative writing and literature. I teach an upper-division course on comics and graphic novels. I include one or two superhero books on the reading list, a nod to the dominant tradition of American comics, but for the most part I assign books with the same literary density and layering that I expect from a class on British modernism or the contemporary American short story. I'm looking for books that are "literary." We read Spiegelman, Bechdel, and the other award-winning, establishment-safe graphic novels I mentioned above. They are all books that seem appropriate for a university seminar.

And so I reveal myself.

Despite a long history with popular comics, despite my love of the American comics tradition and superhero conventions, I immediately privilege one type of comic – the literary – over another – the mainstream, the mass-market. Why? I tell my class and my colleagues that I'm looking to read texts that will generate several days of good conversation and complex readings: texts that can be close-read. But there is another

motivation as well: the desire to gain recognition for comics. As comic scholars we want people to take our subject seriously. We want people to take *us* seriously. And more and more they are. Universities commonly offer classes on comics. Graphic novels are now regularly reviewed in newspapers and mentioned in the same places people talk about currents in literature. Graphic novels are now included in yearly "Best of the Year" roundups. We – the scholars and creators – point to these moments and say, "See! See! This too is serious."

There's a problem in all of this, a problem inherent in the use of the term "graphic novel." Many people use that term to differentiate these mature, literary works from their ancestors and cousins, the comic book, for fear that people associate comic books with juvenile power fantasies. Don't compare these books to comics, compare them to novels, we seem to be saying. Think of Dickens, Flaubert, Balzac, Austen, the Brontës, Joyce, Woolf, Hemingway. Ignore that group of over-muscled men and impossibly bosomed women wearing tights in the corner. In order to legitimize the form we have to disavow our lowbrow roots and associate ourselves with other more highbrow art forms. This is the challenge that faces paraliterature as a whole, not just comics. Fans, writers, and critics all want their literature taken seriously. But is the best way to achieve this by ignoring the literature's roots?

Samuel R. Delany, in his essay "The Politics of Paraliterary Criticism," gives us a good example of an attempt to elevate comics. Delany's essay is largely a response (part praise, part criticism) to Scott McCloud's seminal work of comics criticism, *Understanding Comics*. Published in 1994, McCloud's book is comic book theory written *as* a comic book. It's a fabulous and thoughtful text and it has become the most visible work of comics criticism and the starting place for many scholars and creators. As many critics have done, McCloud begins his discussion by trying to define comics. This is ultimately an impossible task – however you define them you will exclude *some* works and include others (unless your definition is so broad as to be functionally useless). McCloud's definition hinges on sequentiality of static images: "Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the reader" (McCloud 9). While this definition includes Charles Shultz's *Peanuts* but excludes Gary Larson's *The Far Side*, the most important effect is that it allows McCloud to argue that we can find comics all through history: Egyptian hieroglyphics, Trajan's column, the Bayeux Tapestry.

Delany argues against this search for "origins," specifically this attempt to locate the source of comics in something respectable in the hope that the respectable source will imbue the new form with authority. Can we find similarities between Trajan's Column and comics? Absolutely. But as Delany points out, this doesn't lend power or authority to comics. It doesn't make comics more or less important. It doesn't link comics to art as we traditionally imagine it and, by doing so, transform comics into art like so much lead into gold. The only thing the connection does is make the reading experience more enjoyable for those who notice the similarity: "the relation between texts that employ them remains a matter of *resonance* and *pleasure* – in the

way that a resonant note, calling up echoes and overtones, might sound richer than one that plunked out devoid of any enharmonics" (227, emphasis in original).

The problem Delany points out in McCloud's argument is ultimately a problem all paraliterature faces. Because it is at the outside of the center, critics will want to marginalize it, minimalize it, dismiss it. The paraliterary critic is then faced with a quandary: she can allow her subject to reside at the edges and she can discuss, even celebrate, its fringy-ness; she can try to pull the subject into the center where it can be accepted by the establishment. The former is often the strategy of pop culture studies that delve into the cultural significance of celebrity gossip rags, blogs, fashion, viral videos, or Twitter posts. We see the latter in the literature professor who includes a token genre novel on a syllabus. We teach Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel *Persepolis*, or Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*, or Dashiell Hammett's *Maltese Falcon* and feel like we have played the part of the populist and also done our best to redeem comics, science fiction, and detective novels. Meanwhile we still sniff at the Harlequin romances and the Dan Browns and the Stephenie Meyers that we find on the racks at the Walmart or the drugstore, because they still aren't literary enough.

Ultimately this is a discussion of value. This isn't merely an academic question, a conundrum for critics to chew on. There is an underlying debate about what makes a good mass-market book, what makes a valuable romance novel or fantasy novel. Does it get better as it comes to resemble canonical fiction, or conversely, is this when it is least true to its form? Is it best when it fully embraces its genre?

Let's bring this back to the students from the beginning of the essay. What do I tell my students when they bring me sprawling paraliterary novels? How do I help improve them? By getting them to write something entirely different? Is it our job as creative writing professors *within* the academy to move our students away from paraliterature and toward literature?[5] This tends to be the standard progression: away from the lowbrow, the naive, toward the highbrow, the sophisticated. I've seen this happen over and over: students come into a class or a program writing paraliterature and leave writing proper, tamed literature. And even if this isn't always true, even if there are teachers who embrace paraliterature and believe it too can be sophisticated, the higher education system as a whole projects this set of priorities. At the time of writing there seem to be only three M.F.A. programs that support and promote popular or genre fiction, and all three are low-residency programs: University of Southern Maine – Stonecoast, Seton Hill University in Greensburg, PA (not to be confused with Seton Hall University in New Jersey), and Western State Colorado University.

Graduate programs aren't receptive to paraliterary projects: writers of romances, erotica, mysteries, science fiction, dark fantasy, and dystopian science fiction are not going to get a lot of help writing in those genres in the standard M.F.A. program. Moreover, they are less likely to be accepted in a top M.F.A. program than a writer of literary fiction. Popular fiction writers in turn dismiss the programs. The M.F.A. programs reject paraliterature because it is too plot-oriented and commercial; the

popular writers reject the programs because they produce boring fiction that will never sell. This debate is just a variation on another debate about the value of M.F.A. programs that flares up every now and then: do the programs actually make students better writers or are they a waste of time and money? Even worse, do they produce bad, formulaic fiction?[6] People talk about the workshop story with a certain disdain, framing it as writing-by-committee. And it's true. The worst workshop stories, maybe even the majority of workshop stories, are boring and formulaic. The worst, or the majority, of genre fiction is also boring and formulaic. It is not because of the programs or lack of programs. It is because people at the beginning of their writing careers – literary or paraliterary – aren't usually good writers, just as beginning singers, artists, and dancers aren't going to be good.

I'm not going to wade fully into the M.F.A. debate, but suffice it to say that I believe strongly in the ability of an M.F.A. program to create better writers. I also believe that writing can be taught. The formula for becoming a better writer is simple, in my mind. The main part is time spent writing. If you want to become a better writer you have to put in thousands of hours of writing. This too is true of any endeavor: think of the hours that a serious ballet dancer, piano player, or even soccer player spends practicing, every day for years. But in addition to hours spent, there needs to be pressure placed upon the writing. Without pressure, a writer/dancer/ musician/soccer player can make the same mistakes over and over until they become ingrained in their patterns. In some rare cases this might lead to an exciting, naively energetic pattern we haven't seen before – we exalt the untrained outsider art of Henry Darger or Gregory Blackstock – but more often the product is forgettable. Writers of the paraliterary require the same pressure placed upon their writing as all other writers. And because it sits outside of the academy, there's no good, formal system for exerting this pressure. There are support networks out there – endless books on how to write, authors' blogs, online communities, writing workshops – but as a writing professor, I want our education system to address the needs of these writers as much as any other writer. But this, again, requires some idea of how to help paraliterary writers improve. And this requires a sense of what makes paraliterature good or bad. What *is* a good comic book? What is a good urban fantasy? What is good erotica?

I get uncomfortable when I have to talk with my students about what makes a good or bad story. Perhaps I'm always worried that I will inadvertently dismiss a book loved dearly by one of my students and hurt his or her feelings. The humanities are a respectful, nurturing sphere, but maybe we've become too sensitive? I don't want to offend anyone's taste, so I tiptoe around the topic by opening it up for conversation: "Is there such a thing as good and bad fiction? Are some stories better than others?" I ask. And again, because we recognize that people hold vastly different opinions and we want to respect them all, we are uncomfortable with this kind of evaluation. One woman responded that *any* story loved by even one person was good. And in some sense she's right. That story has value to that person.

But is "liked" the same as "good"? The second *Transformers* movie, *Revenge of the Fallen*, is the fourteenth highest grossing movie of all time, having made $400 million. Seventy-five percent of the 3,840,705 viewers who have rated it on the movie-review website rottentomatoes.com *liked* it. Only 21 percent of critics agree (Flixster). But I don't hesitate to say that this is a bad movie. One of the worst movies I've ever seen. Are the fans wrong? Am I? No. Because like and good aren't synonymous. I like McDonald's cheeseburgers sometimes. They are *not* good food. There is better food out there and we know it when we eat it, but those cheeseburgers will continue to sell millions every year. Everything is *not* equal, just because someone somewhere likes it. As architect Christopher Alexander wrote in *The Timeless Way of Building*:

> We have been taught that there is no objective difference between good buildings and bad, good towns and bad.
> The fact is that the difference between a good building and a bad building, between a good town and a bad town, is an objective matter. It is the difference between health and sickness, wholeness and dividedness, self-maintenance and self-destruction. (25)

There *is* good music and bad. There *is* good art and bad. There *is* good television and bad. We know this deep down, even if we can't quite put our finger on what determines good and bad. Alexander, not entirely helpfully, attributes goodness in buildings to the "quality with no name" (25).

But if you keep with it, Alexander's argument about what leads to bad buildings is instructive. Through most of history people helped construct the buildings they lived in and used. If I wanted a house I would have to build it. The knowledge of how to build passed from generation to generation like a language. My house would speak to what I needed from a house and it would address where it was built (a house in Norway would not be the same as a house in Italy), but the house would also learn – from that intragenerational language – what makes for healthy and unhealthy spaces. This is the same way a farmer might learn from her parents how to prepare a field, the right time to plant a crop, the best way to plant it. Or how a cook learns from his parents how to prepare a country's traditional diet, developed over hundreds of years to balance the specific foods that grow there.

For Alexander, the real problem started when building became industrialized: when the few started building for the many instead of the many building for themselves. Construction became the domain of a handful of developers and architects, building subdivisions with hundreds of houses. These houses are built before they are bought, so they can't take into account the particularities of their occupants. Any building decisions are not based on personal reasons or regional reasons but on economic reasons: *How can we maximize profit?* This is how it ends up that the split-level house of my fifth-grade friend, in a suburb of Salt Lake City, UT, is almost *identical* to the split-level house of my grad-school roommate, in a suburb of Philadelphia, PA. Most modern homes are bad buildings because they are distanced from the traditional

language of building and instead incorporate bad decisions based on economic – rather than personal – reasons. This is ultimately the problem with mass food, mass movies, mass music, mass television, and mass comics.

And this, perhaps, is where we can find our problem: not with paraliterature, per se, but in any literature – popular or literary – that doesn't grow out of a genuine, authentic relationship between the author and her or his material. It is literature that accepts other people's choices as its own. We have a number of names for this: formula, convention, cliché. J.R.R. Tolkien wrote brilliant fantasy novels that grew up organically from his interest in literary history, myth, and philology. The myths and languages and songs of Middle Earth were as important as the action. It was the texture that gave birth to a real world. Hundreds of thousands of writers have imitated Tolkien's world and mimicked his characters and plotlines, but they fall flat and feel like stereotypes. They are building someone else's blueprint. We see the same thing in the many literary writers who have imitated Raymond Carver, or Hemingway. One can and should learn from Carver, but if I try to write a Carver story (especially without the help of Gordon Lish) I am building someone else's house. The fantasy novels that just imitate Tolkien and the literary short stories that imitate Carver all suffer from the problem: they are inauthentic literature. And while this inauthentic literature may sometimes be successful, even popular, it will always be mediocre, never good.

So how do we develop a pedagogy of the paraliterary? Certainly not by turning paraliterary authors away at the gates of the academy (guarded by a dog with the heads of Shakespeare, Milton, and Chaucer). Not by sequestering paraliterary writers off in a separate space at the outskirts of town, in a literary shantytown. Instead we need to take an entirely different approach to creative writing classes that is less interested in improving stories and more interested in why writers make the choices they make. As long as our primary question is how to make a story better, we will be insisting on the centrality of a particular aesthetic: in this case the literary aesthetic. What if we ask, instead, why the author is writing this story? And I don't mean that as an easily dismissible question, or as an invitation to engage in therapy, but as a deep, soul-searching question about our relationship to our stories. Why are you writing this? Go ahead and write paraliterature, but what does it mean for *you* to be writing a fantasy novel or a vampire novel? How is your story different from every other person's?

How are your decisions determined by you – your background, your family, where you live and have lived, your economic class – and not simply because they are genre conventions established long ago. If I give you a plot of land and all the materials and a modicum of expertise, how would the house you build be different than every other house? It wouldn't be entirely different; it would have a roof, windows, doors. But beyond that? If you were to really make it your own? Sure, you could build a split-level exactly like the one you grew up in, or you could sit down and really think about what you need from a house and what a house needs from you. This line of questioning is exactly the same for a writer of literature and paraliterature. I don't see

any reason why the two types of writing cannot coexist in a classroom. Instead of trying to impose a dominant aesthetic, we need to be examining what each author's relationship to her or his aesthetic is. Ultimately it comes down to an incredibly difficult, important question: Why do you write? This question will take years to answer properly. Our writing careers are, in their entirety, an attempt to answer this question. Many people will never figure it out and will never know what they are trying to answer in their fiction. They will repeat other people's patterns, and they might even be popular and make lots of money, but the books won't be good.

NOTES

1 In the past five years I've found that more and more students have more than one novel finished. One 18-year-old student had already completed seven novels. Many of these students are participating in National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo, or as the students call it, NaNo): the idea is that one writes a novel in the month of November. It has to be 50,000 words long: 1,667 words (or around 6–7 pages) a day. I'm ambivalent about NaNoWriMo. On one hand, anything that gets people writing is exciting. And NaNo is getting *lots* of people to write. In 2011, 256,618 people participated in the challenge and 36,843 completed it (NaNoWriMo, "Facts and Stats"). But writing seven pages a day for a month, with an emphasis on putting enough words on the page, not on crafting either the story or the language, is not a recipe for a successful novel. Nor is it something easy to let go of. I've now had too many students enter my classes wanting to fix up their sprawling NaNo manuscripts in order to submit them for publication.

2 Mark McGurl argues in *The Program Era* that postwar American literary fiction (shaped primarily by the emergence of the creative writing M.F.A. programs) can be divided into three relatively discrete divisions: technomodernism, high cultural pluralism, and lower-middle-class modernism (32).

3 As do most young readers. The canon of children's and young adult literature is *filled* with what would later in life be considered paraliterature: think of C.S. Lewis, J.M. Barrie, Madeleine L'Engle, Lewis Carroll, J.K. Rowling, Philip Pullman. Fantasy and imagination is desirable in children. It only becomes suspect later in life. Is it just that there's little place for imagination among the cubicles?

4 While I won't argue that the collecting craze made comics worse, I will argue that the practice of bagging and protecting comics has made the experience of comics worse. Comics are still, first and foremost, books. They should be read. Ideally, again and again. And if we bag them, seal them, and stash them away in a box, never to be seen again, they have stopped being books and are only *objects*. Objects estranged from their purpose, to be protected because they may be valuable. But they won't. We've seen that already. I never bag any of my comics.

5 I say *within* the academy because while there are many creative writing instructors outside of the academy – in workshops, classes, writing groups, online forums – the undergraduate and graduate creative writing programs are at the center of creative writing *instruction* in the United States.

6 Most recently, Mark McGurl's *The Program Era*, a critical examination of the M.F.A. program's influence on postwar American fiction, rekindled the debate. Elif Batuman wrote a review in the *London Review of Books* titled "Get a Real Degree," where she is less interested in critiquing McGurl than in bashing M.F.A. programs and workshop writing. What she most dislikes about program writing is its "oversophistication combined with an air of autodidacticism." A firestorm started online and all the old arguments for and against M.F.A.s were trotted out again.

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16
Creative Writing and Education

Jeri Kroll

Creative Writing as a subject in the twenty-first century in some ways still reflects its origins and in others is radically different. Rapid growth, globalization and the professionalization of writers who teach in primary, secondary and tertiary education as well as in the community have contributed to fluidity in conceptions about its aims and methods. In other words, "we," the writers and teachers of writing, do not all teach in the same way, in the same context, or even in the same country. UK writer Rebecca O'Rourke calls attention to this fluidity by asking, "Is there a universal 'we' here – or are there conflicts within and between modes and domains of practice?" (58). She theories that writers in fact belong to one or more communities of practice that operate in different formal and informal educational environments.

Critics and writers inside and outside of the academy continue to debate Creative Writing's origins. Clearly authors took part in the literary culture of their times in informal associations such as clubs and salons for several hundred years and also participated in higher education as students and professors (Harper) before being incorporated formally into a discipline. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow modeled the teacher as academic, entering the university "as a surrogate for patronage" (Myers 6) and setting a pattern for those who wanted to dedicate themselves to literature – but he did not actually teach poetry writing, but languages (Myers 1). In addition, correspondence or distance education, which began in the eighteenth century, also extended to writing, establishing the foundations for contemporary community and online courses.

According to David Myers' well-known history, the birth of Creative Writing as a modern subject in school and university contexts dates from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Advanced Composition course initiated by Harvard in the 1880s (Myers 2) and the University of Iowa's first attempt, Verse-Making, offered in 1897,[1] are the most prestigious forbears. North American educational progressive Hughes Mearns established writing in schools in the 1920s in order to foster "personal growth" (Myers 101, 111). Teachers then employed it to achieve a specific educational goal, "to reform and redefine the academic study of literature" (Myers 4) at both school and tertiary levels. The introduction of postgraduate study matured the discipline: "Creative writing reached its full growth as a university discipline when the purpose of its graduate programs (to produce serious writers) was uncoupled from the purpose of its undergraduate courses (to examine writing seriously from within" (Myers 149). The University of Iowa website still announces that the Writers' Workshop, founded in 1936, is "the oldest graduate creative writing program in the country."[2] It also maintains a conservative approach in its philosophy in two regards: first by asserting that the M.F.A. in English is "a terminal degree qualifying the holder to teach creative writing at the college level," and second, "that writing cannot be taught," even though talent can be nurtured. These statements apply to the North American experience primarily in the second half of the twentieth century and reflect on developments overseas to some extent, but the mission only to "produce serious writers" is not universally subscribed to in higher education. The flourishing of doctoral programs in Australia and the United Kingdom, as well as in the United States, make the M.F.A. as a "terminal degree" problematic. In addition, in Anglophone countries where learning assessment has been systematized at all levels, teachers must argue that writing can indeed be taught, since they are required to enumerate student skill and learning outcomes. As this chapter will suggest, a myriad of intentions and goals lie behind Creative Writing courses globally.

Myers' formulation of Creative Writing's lineage, with its North American bias, has been contested by those living in other regions, who tell their own stories about its birth and favored format – the "craft workshop" (Sennett, Manhire). For example, Jon Cook surveys the development of the workshop in particular, while O'Rourke documents its manifold incarnations in a variety of programs, both underlining the robust history of Creative Writing in alternative locations: "in Britain, summer schools, correspondence courses and adult education provision in creative writing were established long before David Craig launched the undergraduate program at Lancaster University in 1969 and Malcolm Bradbury the postgraduate program at the University of East Anglia (UEA) in 1970" (O'Rourke 37). Nevertheless, as a subject in community, school, college and university contexts it did not have the same reach as in North America. Australia's tertiary educational system developed along British lines, introducing writing in the 1970s, and experienced accelerated growth. Later this chapter argues that the history of the discipline changes course, in particular, at the research higher degree level.

Creative Writing can be conceptualized, therefore, as a nexus of paths with varying agendas, authors working in different capacities at different points. At the undergraduate level Anna Leahy formulates this complex as the contestation of authority: "who has permission to do what, who has which rights in the creative and academic processes . . . and how all these are in flux" (ix). How teachers ascribe value to creative outputs is still one of the critical points of debate at secondary and tertiary level, where marks must be awarded. In a community context, questions about authority must be asked of a range of stakeholders with sometimes competing agendas. O'Rourke, for example, highlights the manner in which writers in the community find means of support, tutor newcomers, forge alternative careers, and reinvigorate not only their own practice but also local cultures under precarious funding conditions. Key in this process is understanding writing as a "social practice . . . that valued making, as well as interpreting, literary texts" (O'Rourke 2).

This understanding of the benefits of writing as a process conditions how it is integrated into school curricula, with goals such as enhancing creativity, supporting self-expression, and increasing self-esteem. The formulation finds parallels in the principles of andragogy (adult learning) developed in Europe (Harper 207). In a South American context, Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* promotes another model of adult cooperative education that he calls "*co-intentional*," where the pedagogical strategy enables "teachers and students (leadership and people)" to function jointly as "critical co-investigators" and so address "the task of re-creating knowledge" (56). Later this chapter explores the interconnections in an author's life that support the view that Creative Writing has multiple identities in the community rather than one restricted to formal educational structures.

Since Myers' seminal study, Creative Writing has continued to reinvent itself in each new context. In comparison to established university disciplines, its boundaries are flexible, so that it can find a home within an English or Communications department, or a Cultural Studies, Humanities or Professional Writing school. Educational environments such as kindergartens, community colleges, postgraduate programs, and so on, determine goals, which might range from encouraging creativity, improving literacy or fostering English as a Second Language competence to producing satisfying aesthetic products. There are no typical writing students and no one purpose. Increasingly, the writing workshop has transformed itself to adapt to this variety of practitioners, vocational pathways, and student cohorts.

Beginning in the late twentieth century, Creative Writing expanded its territory and many practitioners added a new dimension to their profiles by conceptualizing it as a research discipline with its own ontology and epistemology, and by forging relationships with like-minded writers in academia around the globe. Since the 1990s, the number of doctoral Creative Writing programs has proliferated in the United States – 36 as of 2010 (Fenza 207) – while they are firmly entrenched in the educational systems of Australia – 30 doctoral programs out of 39 universities[3] – and the United Kingdom, with over 50.[4] Professional associations such as the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) in the US, the Australasian Association

of Writing Programs (AAWP) and the Australian Postgraduate Writers Network (APWN) and Tertiary Writers' Network New Zealand (TWN),[5] the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE) in the United Kingdom, and the more recently founded Asia Pacific Writers and Translators Association (AP Writers)[6] and Canadian Creative Writers and Writing Programs (from 2010) have developed to support teachers, their students, and independent authors who want to function professionally within and outside a variety of institutional structures.[7] English-language speakers have the advantage of being able to share teaching and administrative practices; international collaboration takes place more easily on the level of conference attendance, academic exchanges, and publishing.

Outside Anglophone countries, the integration of Creative Writing into education poses linguistic and cultural challenges. Although European countries possess rich literary cultures with lengthy histories, "the late arrival of the discipline, differences between the various national cultures and, in particular, linguistic barriers" (Soukup 288) make development within a country as well as cooperation between countries challenging. Significantly, visual artists and administrators working in universities, academies and museums in Europe have forged cooperative relationships and facilitated research at an advanced level earlier than Creative Writing, perhaps because language does not pose obstacles to the same extent in fields predominantly not based on text.[8] Most recently in the past decade, Asia has turned to developing a Creative Writing educational culture. National agendas dictate how the first formal tertiary courses and informal workshops have been devised in mainland China, Hong Kong, Korea, and Singapore (Boey; Tay and Leung; Dai). Undergraduate courses encourage technical competence in a second language, Master of Fine Arts degrees focus on creative excellence, and informal workshops support local literary cultures. This chapter thus focuses later on higher education globally where Creative Writing as a subject has begun to flourish in new environments.

How can critics track the history of this volatile subject area, since it remains dynamic? This chapter has chosen to focus on the writers who teach it, since their professionalization at all levels determines why, when, what and how Creative Writing is taught, valued and evaluated. Conventional dictionary definitions of *professional* encompass, among other things, the idea of "following an occupation" (*Macquarie Dictionary*) that offers financial rewards. In addition, a "professional" is someone who possesses a body of disciplinary knowledge and who has reached a certain level of expertise. It can apply, therefore, to celebrity writers as well as to writers in the academy, the schools and the community.

The nature of professional development depends on the educational environment in which writers must function. Those who seek employment and career advancement feel the pressure to reshape academic and creative profiles as a consequence. For example, the school Creative Writing tutor and undergraduate teacher might need similar training – a Bachelor's Degree, perhaps an advanced diploma in Education and/or a Master of Fine Arts. A publishing record will always be advantageous. As opposed to a conventional academic, who will qualify by obtaining a doctorate, the

Creative Writing university professor, especially in North America, might find their marketability lies in their creative portfolio: well-reviewed books, prestigious publishers, grants and awards. In Australia and the UK, however, the doctorate takes precedence, although a high-profile author can move into professorial positions. The other vocational pathway that many in Australia, the UK and the US have been encouraged to travel leads into the community and schools; this often involves residencies in regional areas removed from urban culture. Working with a myriad of age groups in a variety of physical and institutional settings demands skills that are not taught specifically in undergraduate let alone postgraduate writing programs. The transformation of Creative Writing as a subject with multiple stakeholders has, therefore, driven the professionalization that has altered the profile of many who teach it.

As a consequence, twenty-first century authors, who might be said to possess multifaceted personalities, have learned how to "perform" identities to thrive economically and creatively. The nomenclature to categorize them in professional contexts highlights these identities and, sometimes, ambivalence over their status: Writer in the Schools, Writer in the Community (including appointments for specific cohorts, such as the disabled, young people, seniors, et al.), Writer-in-Residence, Editor-in-Residence, Teacher-Writer, Freelance Writer, and Visiting or Adjunct Professor. The professional pathways that they follow are not linear but rhizomatic, sending roots into and drawing sustenance from the complex body of literary culture and global education. Publishers market creative output, governments and philanthropic institutions occasionally fund writing time, but for the majority of authors this does not provide a reliable income. It is writers' groups, community organizations, schools and universities that generate the kind of work that requires increased professionalization.

The Writer in the Schools

Any discussion of Creative Writing in education must address two problematic areas: the definition of the subject itself, and the institutional structures within which it is taught. These two condition the professional writer, who must develop appropriate methodologies and content to achieve appropriate goals. In 2008, the UK National Association of Writers in Education formulated a Creative Writing Subject Benchmark Statement and a Creative Writing Research Benchmark Statement that cover community, primary, secondary, and tertiary environments.[9] It included the following:

> Creative Writing is the study of writing (including poetry, fiction, drama and creative non-fiction) and its contexts through creative production and reflection on process. By writing, we not only mean books and other printed materials, but also scripted and unscripted performances, oral and recorded outputs, and the variety of forms possible in electronic, digital and other new media . . .

This "broad church" definition demonstrates that the subject welcomes traditional and innovative technologies and encourages those who began as practitioners (such as new media workers, for example) to teach their specialties.

The concept of the Writer or Artist in the School developed significantly in the second half of the twentieth century. That term, employed in publicity and on grant applications and résumés, describes the geographical location of writers as much as their functions, bestowing a professional identity on them while simultaneously suggesting its temporality. In schools, writers are identified as adjuncts to the central program, as "writers-in-." One could visualize a writer dropped down for a limited time and then hoisted up and away when the contract expires. Some make isolated guest appearances at Meet the Author sessions common in Australasia, North America and the UK in schools, at literary festivals and in intensive workshops. Writers are encouraged to perform publicly the persona of the creator. Speaking about their compositional processes, showing drafts and confessing to writer's block are some strategies that provide a personal snapshot of the creative life.

In North America one of the first exponents of the Writer in the Schools was poet and playwright Kenneth Koch. A Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, he had taught writing to adults at Columbia and the New School (Koch 2), so he had artistic and pedagogical expertise, but he wondered if this would translate to working with children. There was a history of teaching art with young people (Koch 2–3), he realized, but poetry had been neglected. Sponsorship from the Academy of American Poets and the Teachers' and Writers' Collaborative gave him the opportunity to conduct regular workshops with elementary school students in New York City to answer that question. He shared his discoveries in the seminal books *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams: Teaching Children to Write Poetry* (Koch and the Students of P.S. 61), and *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red? Teaching Great Poetry to Children* (Koch). Here the writer within the university extended his reach outside the academy, believing that introducing young people to poetry early in their education set the groundwork for appreciation in later years.

Once Koch had made writing enjoyable and nonthreatening in practical workshops, he proceeded to introduce his favorite "great" poems and to

> make these adult poems a part of their own writing. I taught reading poetry and writing poetry as one subject. I brought them together by means of "poetry ideas," which were suggestions I would give to the children for writing poems of their own in some way like the poems they were studying. (Koch 3–4).

This is a distilled version of the type of exercises common in adult creative writing classes, but which keeps in the forefront of the teacher's mind the necessity for appealing to children's natural love of language, their capacity for imaginative play and their willingness to experiment. It is also the concept of "reading as a writer" boiled down to its essential elements – read, enjoy, discuss and respond. Perhaps as significant,

Koch did not condescend to children but ensured they understood enough to enjoy the poems and hence felt free to create themselves: "The poems my students wrote were better than most of those in elementary-school textbooks" (6), which oversimplified experience, Koch believed.

Since Koch's groundbreaking work in the 1970s, writers have been embedded in various ways in primary and secondary schools in the English-speaking nations to enrich classroom experience. Professional associations and government bodies have become practiced at advising schools and authors on how to work equitably together. In Britain, for example: "Fees to writers working in schools are not calculated in relation to teacher's pay; nor are they expected to take on areas of work such as record keeping; assessment or evaluation" (O'Rourke 144–145). The Australian Society of Authors and similar American associations also set school visit rates and conditions; this oversight protects writers from exploitation. In addition, positions such as Children's Laureate (the UK, US and Australia) and Children's Poet Laureate (US) promote appreciation of literature and literacy as appointees engage in activities in and outside of schools. The UK Arvon Foundation developed another strategy for young people by offering residential courses with professional writers rather than sending those writers to the classroom.

This rapid growth of Creative Writing in the curriculum generated a need for professional development to train tutors. The National Association of Writers in Education, with its origins in the late 1980s (Munden 216), has a proclaimed mission to support writers in the UK who work in multiple contexts and it has, thus, a history of collaborating with a diverse group of stakeholders, including regional bodies, local councils and schools, to devise appropriate training methods. These methods have a dual focus: teachers can be mentored to teach writing, and writers can be mentored in pedagogical techniques. The first dedicated course of this type occurred in the 1980s, culminating in a push at the beginning of the new century to coordinate training provision for writers seeking a range of educational employment opportunities. A 2001 Arts Council Grant (Munden 229) brought together "a consortium of the FWWCP [Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers], National Association of Literature Development Workers and NAWE" (O'Rourke 150). In 2012, NAWE's website portal, the Writer's Compass,[10] provides a comprehensive service, including placement opportunities and courses for writers.

In Australia the story is similar in that teacher enthusiasm for Creative Writing to update classroom practice, enhance language skills, support reading and writing literacy, and provide imaginative stimulus have combined with the need of writers for income and a professional identity. These goals have been achieved with local, regional, state, national, corporate and private funding to develop initiatives such as Artists and Writers in the Schools programs, writers-in-the-community residencies, young people's festivals such as ALLWRITE! (from 1985), the writers' segment of Come Out Youth Arts' Festival (founded in 1975) and Children's Book Weeks, which all provide

lucrative employment opportunities for writers, as similar events do in Britain and America.[11]

The Writer in the Community

Nomenclature to describe writers placed in community contexts has generated some debate. In the UK, Literature or Writing Development Worker (O'Rourke 142) is often favored, while in Australia the Writer in the Community or Community Writer is common. US organizations employ a variety of terms, including Artist in Residence. Names reflect not only upon the physical and educational environment in which the writer functions but also upon their status and perhaps the source of their funding: "Each community of practice shares a tension about the boundary and nature of professional identity that mirrors, and sometimes drives, the process of legitimating creative writing as a cultural practice and subject discipline within education" (O'Rourke 142). O'Rourke's assertion can be applied to Creative Writing in every educational context, foregrounding the need for writers and their employers to be cognizant of how local and national government policy, especially in relation to funding, affects them.

These are some of the questions that might be asked: is a program designed to stimulate a thirst for lifelong learning; to help participants into a paying career as a freelance writer; to break down social isolation; to empower disadvantaged groups; to increase literacy; to encourage personal development; or some or all of the preceding? This plethora of reasons underlies community-writing programs in the Anglophone countries. They target equally diverse groups: youth at risk, prison inmates, senior citizens, and "special needs" individuals (disabled, mentally ill, and others). These clients have benefited from Writers in the Community in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Some initiatives start as grass-roots movements – local workshops devised by passionate individuals who later secure regular funding, for example – and others are government instigated.

As already mentioned, in the UK training for writers seeking to teach has been supported to some extent at the national level, but this is the exception rather than the rule for the community arts worker more generally. Whether granted an Australian state or federal government fellowship to work in Community Arts under the aegis of a local council or other nonprofit organization, or funded by a North American School Board or UK regional organization, most writers in the community and the university learn on the job, moving from one context to another and building up a body of knowledge that relates as much to dealing with diverse student cohorts as it does to disciplinary knowledge. The growth in Australia since 1985 of state-based (locally and nationally funded) Writers' Centres[12] facilitated this type of professionalization by initiating enrichment programs and suggesting individuals to staff them, concomitantly raising author profiles and providing networking opportunities that sometimes generated future employment. These centers serviced clientele of all ages

through newsletters, information booklets, databases, and a varied program of seminars and workshops. Schoolchildren and their teachers, emerging young writers, mid-career authors, and seniors all benefited.

The pathways followed by those who work in community arts have contributed to increased professionalization. Piecing together an income is a precarious way to structure a career, however. In 2003, the Australian government published a study entitled *Don't Give Up Your Day Job* (Throsby and Hollister) that surveyed Australian artists from 1996 to 2001 and discovered that not only did women earn less than men (61–64) but that the majority of artists in general could not put together a living wage simply from their practice: "much of the value of [their] contribution is not reflected in the market prices that artists command when selling their work – whether they sell their labour . . . or the works their labour produces" (79). The global financial crisis in 2008 ushered in a period of governmental fiscal restraint in the Anglophone countries that has impacted on the arts. The drive for writers to acquire additional degrees comes from competition for casual and permanent work or residencies; concomitantly, this increases scholarship competition to obtain those degrees (a kind of de facto grant).

Doctoral and Masters programs in Creative Writing have flourished worldwide as a consequence, attempting to provide the specialized training traditionally available to other art forms. What tends to be lacking is specific instruction in teaching Creative Writing as a subject itself. Only a few universities in the US have formalized the teaching of Creative Writing in the way that they have formalized the teaching of Composition. In Australia, aside from universities' generic professional development programs, lecturer/tutor meetings seem to be the dominant practice (as, indeed, they support instruction in most disciplines). In the UK, NAWE offers consistent pedagogical support. In addition, what happens in one sector of the writing world often returns to alter established practices in another. The rise of accreditation in adult learning contexts – and, therefore, the need to award credit for courses – has in some ways restricted pathways for students and employment for authors, who might not want to assess their students or retrain.

Writers who have been attracted back to full-time study for M.A.s, M.F.A.s, D.C.A.s or Ph.D.s, and those who have been able to find full-time employment in the academy might have chosen these routes in the main not because they want the degree or job, but because they need financial or employment security. They have chosen to modify the title of "writer" by adding other identities: postgraduate, academic, and educator, for example. As fiscal discipline impacts upon freelance authors who must scratch for the next post, commission or residency, universities see the sense – given the increasing popularity of writing topics – of bringing back into the fold those who have already used their education and creativity in a range of locations. The published writer who has become a professional outside the academy is desirable because they have artistic credibility (a kind of workshop "cred"), are skilled in lateral teaching techniques, and can translate these experiences at the coalface into a tertiary environment to enrich the curriculum and pedagogy.

The Writer in Higher Education

What do administrators, faculty and practitioners call those writers who work in the academy? Often a hyphen and the word order – teacher-writer, for instance – indicates an individual's role. The title academic writer, without the hyphen, possesses a different meaning from writer-academic. One refers to the type of writing the person does as a matter of course in their profession. The second emphasizes that the individual is a writer – creative is implied – since that is what is prioritized by the order. Of course, a conventional academic as well as a writer can be a Professor, which refers to an academic rank, not a qualification. The culture of the campus, school or funding body, therefore, determines which aspect of a professional identity a person chooses to highlight. In the UK, another term tied to a specific program is "Fellow." The Royal Literary Fund, "a British benevolent fund for professional published authors in financial difficulties", manages a scheme founded in 1999 to support undergraduate writing of all types while supporting Fellows, who are placed "in" a university for a contracted period. They do not receive specific training, but qualify because they are "professional" and have "published" work of "literary merit."[13] This program exemplifies others that recognize the precarious nature of authorship and embed time to create into a structure that also gives back to higher education. Living from grant to fellowship, and constantly updating career profiles, however, does not suit all writers, who might look to the relative stability of a job (and title) in a university.

Since the 1990s, the increasing popularity of doctorates in Creative Writing in Australia, the United Kingdom and North America (coupled with its established M.F.A.), and the birth of M.F.A.s in Asia have made a significant impact on writers' status and needs. The niche organizations described above (AWP et al.), for example, have flourished to support teaching, course design and professional development for faculty and students (Brien et al. 238). The establishment of the AWP's journal, *The Writer's Chronicle* (which began life as a newsletter in 1967), was one of the first multipurpose organs to service the Creative Writing community. It was followed by key refereed journals such as *TEXT: Journal of Writers and Writing Courses* (1997) and *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* (2004), which focus on creative writing as research as well as pedagogy and practice. All three have enhanced academic career prospects and disciplinary profiles. In addition, transfers of students and staff between countries (for annual conferences, semesters abroad and sabbaticals) have allowed sharing of pedagogical strategies and research cultures.[14] The pressure to hire credentialed staff has no doubt reflected back upon North America, pushing the development of Creative Writing doctoral programs.

As in other regions, there are competing claims as to which was the first institution to offer a full tertiary program in Australia – the Canberra College of Advanced Education (now the University of Canberra) or the Western Australian Institution of Technology (now Curtin University) (Kroll 43; Krauth; Dawson; Dibble, "Caring"; "Synergy"). These initiatives occurred at the regional "gum tree" or "new" institutions

(Marshall et al. 20–21).[15] Beginning in 1987, colleges of technology and advanced education and some universities underwent a government-mandated amalgamation, which, by the 1990s, left one instead of two tiers of higher education. Academic positives of amalgamation included faculty members who were eager to rejuvenate conventional literary studies, many incorporating theory of various types into syllabi. In addition, the vocational or "professional" bias of colleges facilitated integration of industry agendas and new technologies, since courses tended to be skills oriented, focused on career outcomes. On the negative side, this process embedded certain conflicts in the university system, which manifested themselves in terms of lecturer qualifications. A proportion of teachers from colleges or institutes possessed only Bachelor's or coursework Masters degrees, or industry or art school experience, and hence had difficulty adapting to a research-driven culture. A similar lack of qualified teachers at the tertiary level was felt in the UK when Creative Writing enrolments increased and debates about pedagogy, course design and research training took place.

It is worth highlighting critical differences in the American system from Australia and the UK that impacted on those debates. At many US universities an M.F.A. can still be a terminal degree; faculty members are not pressured to produce critical research, only creative products. They are not required to supervise doctoral students, but perhaps only other M.F.A. or M.A. in Writing students. Those interested in research might focus on poetics or they might follow another avenue if Composition is taught at their universities. Tim Mayers' formulation of "craft criticism" (34) aligns it with Composition Studies, rather than with Creative Writing as a new body of knowledge, by emphasizing its multiple contexts: "Craft criticism attempts to situate the writing of poetry and fiction, and the teaching of poetry and fiction, within institutional, political, social, and economic contexts" (34). The advanced undergraduate and postgraduate experience, however, demands something further than improving writing pedagogy.

Australian Paul Dawson envisages Creative Writing as an integral component of the New Humanities, "an element of Literary Studies that developed as a series of pedagogical responses to the perennial crisis in English, and it provides an institutional space for writers to assert their literary authority as writers" 205). Writers in the academy must do more, however, conceiving of "craft . . . as a conscious and deliberate intervention in the social life of a discourse as well as a series of aesthetic decisions regarding the artistic quality of a work" (211). A natural extension of this mission that enriches the workshop to include an understanding of the social implications of texts and the author's responsibilities is the dissemination of the insights that teaching and research into writing produce. The next step leads to conceptualizing Creative Writing as a research discipline that possesses its own body of knowledge within which new discoveries can be made.

In order to merit a doctorate, candidates must produce an original contribution suitable for dissemination to peers and the public. According to the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development, research is: "Any creative systematic activity undertaken to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man,

culture and society, and the use of this knowledge to devise new applications." Creative practice can also be subsumed under "experimental development," but any discoveries or products must be available for the public benefit (OECD). In the past 20 years, critics and writers in the academy have been conceptualizing how these insights might be generated, what form they might take, how they might be communicated to the culture, and what impact they might have on contemporary art forms. The rise of the doctorate has taken place in a context that necessitates universities outside of North America to produce not only creative work but also research that is assessable by one or another government evaluation system.[16]

This vibrant research culture has given birth to a new species of "How to" text, building on the standard inspirational or instructional book produced in the second half of the twentieth century for apprentice writers or teachers; for example, the formalized "Introduction to" various genres, around which a university or further education course can be based. A more sophisticated incarnation of this "How to" text includes a theoretical grounding and examples of research methodologies (Smith and Dean; Kroll and Harper). The fact that creative writing as a field is generating a range of theoretical positions about practice-led research fuels demand for such books, which fill a gap in pedagogical training. Varieties of texts reflect, therefore, the diverse professional roles writers in the academy must fill.

To summarize, Creative Writing lecturers do some or all of the following: undergraduate and postgraduate teaching and supervision and course design. High-profile or "celebrity" writers commonly do supervision or mentoring; they influence institutional rankings and fundraising. These pressures have driven the practice of strategic hiring or adjunct appointment in Anglophone countries. For example, Toni Morrison, winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize, founded the Princeton Atelier in 1993 and has held a number of positions at Princeton since. J.M. Coetzee, winner of the Nobel Prize and the Booker Prize, is a Professor at the University of Adelaide in South Australia. In 2007, the University of Manchester advertised that "Britain's leading novelist," Martin Amis, had "been appointed as a Professor of Creative Writing in his first teaching post."[17] Asia's M.F.A.s have followed suit in employing those with "both Asian and international backgrounds and expertise" (City University of Hong Kong),[18] particularly for short-term or distance teaching (such as multi-award winning Robin Hemley, for example, from the University of Iowa). Mark McGurl's analysis of the relationship of writing programs to postwar American fiction pinpoints this effect: "More simply, these writers contribute a certain form of prestige to the university's overall portfolio of cultural capital, adding their bit to the market value of the degrees it confers" (408).

Conclusion: The Global Writer in Education

This chapter has argued that twenty-first century authors perform in multiple contexts, each of which demands that they professionalize themselves accordingly. They

have become, therefore, a nexus around which creative and critical activities revolve. Another way of conceptualizing this dynamic is to visualize a spider spinning webs to attach itself to branch or eave, surviving by shifting when necessary, always on the lookout for tasty opportunities and, when one or more anchoring threads tear by chance or intent, finding other safe havens. In the Romantic era, authors commonly subscribed to the classical myth that they were fueled by divine inspiration and felt that society needed what they could offer – although no doubt Coleridge, Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth were acutely aware of the difficulty of earning a living from their literary passions. In his history of Creative Writing, Myers argues that the challenge that the early twentieth century posed for authors was how to achieve "freedom from professionalism" (77). Yet, as the century aged, this goal if not desire abated and universities became cultural and economic refuges. In the present international climate where culture has become a commodity and the word "creative" has been co-opted by advertising and government, authors are encouraged to bolster their creative talent with business acumen in order to become a new breed of professional and, in some cases, global nomads.

This perspective leads to uncomfortable challenges for writers in education, especially since the global financial crisis in 2008 began to restrict arts funding: "Market-induced cultures of audit, competition and entitlement have resulted in the weakening of professional authority, sense of purpose and societal prestige" (Murphy 509). In developed nations, authors feel the pressure "to publish or perish" in order to keep their creative profiles current so that schoolteachers and academics think of them when employment opportunities arise. In some institutions the research culture pressures them to produce critical work as well, so that in effect they must follow two career paths. Another way of understanding these challenges is to focus on what has happened to the master–apprentice dyad, especially in Creative Writing higher education, where courses often need to enumerate generic skills and outcomes (as, indeed, in all disciplines), such as "enhancing creativity." The professionals who teach are in some sense the masters and students the apprentices as they have been historically. Certainly in the visual and music arts the concept of mastering a craft has established practices. Museums are replete with apprentice painters sketching their forebears, honing technical skills that cannot be acquired for most except by intensive practice: "creativity demands expert knowledge of one type or another – of sonnets, sonatas, sine-waves" (Boden 23). The Creative Writing workshop is a space where expertise can be modeled by professionals and technical skills taught, if participants give themselves over to that sustained immersion in the field.

When students desire qualifications primarily to achieve a job or publication (the outcome), rather than committing themselves to the workshop process itself that might eventually deliver that outcome at a higher level and lift an individual's performance, workshop culture is distorted. Grade inflation demonstrates a fundamental alteration of the dynamic between teacher and student: "That the relationship has morphed into one of producer/consumer rather than professional/client is important" (Murphy 512–513). Furthermore, if the master has reduced time to practice their own

craft, their profile suffers and they lose credibility. Many changes in educational culture have had positive effects nevertheless. For example, online workshops and degrees with local, regional, national or indeed transnational student bodies have opened up Creative Writing education at all levels to groups who previously could not access it. These cutting-edge courses necessitate new conceptualizations of the workshop, the master–apprentice dyad and practice-led research (see Mort on cultural exchange), and new modes of educational delivery.

Significantly, in the past two decades, the rise of global media and the new technologies, and the spread of English as a dominant language in business have encouraged Asian educational systems to begin to adapt Creative Writing to their own cultural agendas. Inevitably, they have drawn on North American, British and Australasian programs for models (Dai) at the undergraduate and, most recently, at the postgraduate level in the founding of two Masters of Fine Arts Creative Writing Programs in English, one at the University of Hong Kong[19] and the most recent at the City University of Hong Kong.[20] Both advertise teachers with international reputations. The writing professional – "Have computer, will travel" – can find short-term, lucrative employment overseas now as well as in the countless low-residency programs in North America, the writers' conferences in Australia and the "workshop schools" making an imprint on the cultural landscape of Europe (Soukup). These new centers for Creative Writing education and research suggest a confidence around the globe in using language as writers see fit and as befits their experience, demonstrated by non-native speakers in their home countries writing in English and those who belong to the global diasporic community.

This postcolonial flexibility in approach has also encouraged debate around expanding emerging writers' cultural horizons. In "Writing across/between Borders," Kim Cheng Boey suggests introducing "transnational studies as a corollary of Creative Writing in the Asia Pacific" (4), which takes account of the vibrant Asian diaspora populations that have spread throughout the world. Translation Studies, a natural partner to Creative Writing, fits into the postcolonial academy too and postgraduate translation programs are growing. Hélène Cixous emphasizes the cultural depth and psychological resonance that come from intimate knowledge of a language and the challenge for a writer of bridging the gap: "**I** for one language, **I** another language, and between the two, the line that makes them vibrate; writing forms a passageway between two shores" (3). The Center for the Art of Translation in San Francisco does not restrict its activities, however, to adults. It runs Poetry Inside Out, which is the center's literary arts program that fosters imagination and builds students' "problem solving, critical thinking, and literacy skills through the translation and composition of poetry,"[21] in particular engaging those whose parents speak a language other than English at home. Translation integrated into education at several levels offers yet another professional avenue for writers.

Perhaps the fact that demonstrates most cogently this heightened professional awareness is that writers as teachers have become objects of study themselves. McGurl talks about the "larger multivalent social dynamic of self-observation" (12) that char-

acterizes the late twentieth century, and this self-consciousness extends to the discipline and practitioners of Creative Writing, grounded by the work of scientists, critics, intellectuals and artists studying cognition, "artscience" (Edwards) and creativity (Pope; Sawyer). Their focus on creator, including the creative brain (Andreasen), and process provides a fertile new research avenue, which influences innovative creative and critical work and, in turn, reflects back on pedagogy in the academy (see Goldsmith (8) on the concept of "uncreative writing").

The newest incarnations of writers in education exploit other art forms and new technologies or work in a collaborative manner, critiquing process and product while engaging with notions of originality and plagiarism (Goldsmith). Multidisciplinary projects demand a range of skills that the younger generation have or are happy to acquire. They often arrive at high school, community groups and colleges computer literate and digitally sophisticated. Developments in cyberspace have, thus, rapidly shifted the educational goal posts by raising questions about form and style, let alone about aesthetic quality, ethics and authorship. Writing in modes for the web (poetry, narratives, hypertext) truly globalizes content and must alter the way in which professionals teach and the platforms they utilize. Incorporating blogs into course design as some educators are already doing provides a case in point, since blogs are one of the fastest growing areas of the internet that expand the pool of potential authors: "According to a count by *Business Week*, there are more than nine million currently active blogs, with some forty thousand new ones appearing every day" (Baron 165). In summary, technical, electronic, political and economic developments that shape the global context for writers affect how they view themselves, produce innovative work by learning new modes, attract and maintain audiences, and teach the next generation of creators.

NOTES

1 See www.uiowa.edu./~iww/about (accessed Jan. 2013).

2 At http://www.uiowa.edu/~iww/anniversary.html (accessed Jan. 2013).

3 Email from Jen Webb, Sept. 15, 2012, providing statistics from research gathered for a project, Examination of Doctoral Degrees in Creative Arts: Process, Practice and Standards, PP10–1801 (2011–2012), funded by the Commonwealth Office of Learning and Teaching. *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses* maintains a database of Australian university writing programs but it is not current to 2012.

4 See National Association of Writers in Education, at http://www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/writing-at-university/writing-courses.html (accessed Jan. 2013).

5 The APWN, funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council, describes itself as "a national community of teaching academics, research students and graduates involved in creative writing higher degree programs," see http://www.writingnetwork.edu.au (accessed Jan. 2013). The TWN New Zealand is a loose organization that primarily manages a biannual conference and an online forum, see http://www.twn-nz.ning.com (accessed Jan. 2013). Its focus is undergraduate teaching and technical/vocational writing.

6 AP Writers is an association for authors and literary translators from the Asia-Pacific

region," see http://www.apwriters.org (accessed Jan. 2013). It is the new incarnation of the Asia-Pacific Writing Partnership, established in 2005 at Griffith University in Queensland, Australia.

7 See *New Writing* 8.3 (2011) for histories of individual international organizations.

8 Balkema and Slager, *Artistic Research*, summarizes a European symposium and contains information about visual arts activity in seven countries.

9 See link at http://www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/writing-at-university/research.html (accessed Jan. 2013).

10 At http://www.nawe.co.uk/the-writers-compass.html (accessed Jan. 2013).

11 For the annual Book Week festival promoted by the Children's Book Council of Australia see http://cbca.org.au/bookweek.htm (accessed Jan. 2013). In the US, Children's Book Week, established in 1919, "is the longest-running literacy initiative in the country," see www.bookweekonline.com/about (accessed Jan. 2013).

12 The South Australian Writers' Centre was the first to be established in 1985.

13 See http://www.rlf.org.uk/index.cfm and http://www.rlf.org.uk/fellowshipscheme/index.cfm (accessed Jan. 2013).

14 Increasingly writers in the academy join overseas disciplinary bodies to keep abreast of developments and to foster collaboration. For example, the Director of NAWE has been elected to the AAWP Committee of Management and NAWE publicizes AAWP activi-

ties and conferences. The Asia Pacific Writers' Board includes writers from a number of countries.

15 The Group of Eight Universities, Australia's "sandstone" institutions, are equivalent to the US Ivy League or the UK Russell Group. The newer redbrick universities in Britain also developed innovative programs earlier than the more established institutions.

16 Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom manage just such government-devised research evaluation systems.

17 For Martin Amis's appointment see http://www.arts.manchester.ac.uk/newwriting/news/amis/ (accessed Jan. 2013); he joined Manchester's Centre for New Writing that also includes novelist Patricia Duncker. Currently Morrison is Robert F. Goheen Professor in the Humanities, Emerita, and Special Consultant to the Director of the Princeton Atelier in the Lewis Center for the Arts. The J.M. Coetzee Centre for Creative Practice, founded in March 2012, "brings together Creative Writing and Music in order to explore what drives the creative process," see https://hss.adelaide.edu.au/research/creative_practice.html (accessed Jan. 2013).

18 See http://www.english.cityu.edu.hk/en/programmes/mfa/ (accessed Jan. 2013).

19 Part-time, see http://www.english.hku.hk/mfa.htm (accessed Jan. 2013).

20 Low residency, see http://www.english.cityu.edu.hk/mfa) (accessed Jan. 2013).

21 See http://www.catranslation.org/poetry-inside-out (accessed Jan. 2013).

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17
The Rise and Rise of Writers' Festivals

Cori Stewart

In the last half century, writers' festivals have flourished in number, popularity and geographic reach. Beyond their places of origin in England, Australia and Canada, writers' festivals have proliferated in other Anglo as well as non-Anglo countries, including Germany, China, Thailand, Israel, Spain, and Kenya. During this 50-year period, writers' festivals have also expanded their initial function as events for creative writers to meet, to become important sites of public culture that address the issues of creative writing as well as ideas of broader interest: especially ideas about place, politics and the products of celebrity culture (Stewart, "We Call upon the Author to Explain"). This chapter explores the nature of these events, and presents them in an international topography using world literature (Casanova) and public culture (Carter and Ferres) theory. The chapter also situates writers' festivals within the realities and practices of today's globalized book publishing industry (Lee, Nash, Crocker, Raccah). Reflecting on this topography, the chapter concludes by considering the future for this global network of writers' festivals in an environment where the publishing industry is being disintermediated by the rise of digital technologies.

To commence, it is useful to describe what writers' festivals are, and consider the likely reasons why authors and the public attend them. Almost always, writers' festivals are assemblages of in-the-flesh author interviews, talks, readings, panels, performances, workshops and, at times, behind-the-scene rights trading business, held over consecutive days. While the status of an individual festival – in what is a hotly contested hierarchy of writers' festivals – is traditionally pegged against the festival bill's most prestigious literary author, there is a growing trend toward programming

writers of genre fiction, essayists, biographers, journalists, bloggers, and even screen-writers, musicians, comedians, chefs, and politicians as festival drawcards. This heady mix of high art and popular culture visibly marks the influential role of the media in shaping contemporary writers' festivals: here, writers are promoted as celebrities, and the inverse can also be true, celebrities (many with ghostwritten books) are being promoted as writers.

For writers and book publishers, writers' festivals are promotional opportunities. But self-promotion and selling books are not the only reason writers attend festivals. They may want to network, or have the opportunity to publicly discuss and debate their work. Other reasons might be vanity, travel, or the desire to assess their reader-ship or fans. It could also be an interest in partying, gaining validation, or the chance to contribute to public debate separate from their work. Regardless of the potential desires, writers have also been reported to quip that they attend festivals under their publisher's duress, and that festivals distract them from the important work that they do: writing rather than performing (Lawson, Llewellyn, Dessaix, Starke).

Like writers, audiences have their own overlapping as well as alternative reasons for attending writers' festivals. One participant, for instance, described them as a type of elevated experience: "a kind of spiritual existence apart from the sandpaper of culture" (Meehan in Moran, *Star Authors*, 44). While not an exhaustive list, further reasons why people attend festivals might be to be entertained; to explore ideas and to be informed about issues; to gain a sense of community by being part of the festival performance – responding and being responded to; the feeling that as a reader or fan you have a stake in the work of an author; the desire for uncensored and less mediated access to an author and their ideas; the corroboration of a text via an author's own biography or personality; a wish to experience the unique timbre of an author read their text; and finally, for writers, to get tips that inform their own writing and writing practice (Stewart, *Culture*; Starke).

For many literary commentators, however, the wide range of content now pre-sented at writers' festivals, and especially the forms of celebrity culture that they now generate, has led them to claim that these festivals contribute to the decline of litera-ture as well as the decline of public culture (Dessaix, Starke, Lawson, Lurie, Meehan). Academic Michael Meehan, for example, goes as far as to claim writers' festivals "de-industrialize" the literary arts.[1] He suggests that a form of "surrogate literacy" has grown up around them, in which physical closeness outranks a knowledge of texts: "I've not read James Ellroy, but I have seen James Ellroy; I have not read Arundhati Roy, but I have touched the hem of her garment" (5). Similarly, academic Ruth Starke laments that Australia's Adelaide Writers' Week now "dumbs down" the fes-tival to meet the commercial interests of publishers rather than engaging in the "serious stuff of writing" (251); author Robert Dessaix publicly protested that "authors now have to tap dance as well as write books" (251); and literary agent Caroline Lurie criticized the overly festive nature of writers' festivals, saying their "demographic [now] expands beyond passionate lovers of literature to a more general and well cashed-up audience who wants to hear and see the latest Booker winner, the

spunk author whose sexy novel was made into a film and the new black chick on the international circuit" (12).

This chapter argues against the above critique, and highlights the limitations of articulating the value of writers' festivals exclusively through the aesthetic codes of the "literary." To further unravel notions of the literary, Pascale Casanova's theory of world literature is examined because it speaks to the aesthetic as well as economic spatiality of writers' festivals and the publishing industry. Using Casanova's ideas, this chapter categorizes writers' festivals as being either "international" or "peripheral" events. "International" refers to the cities with the highest level of "literary capital," with Paris at the top, followed by New York, London, Berlin, Barcelona, Toronto, and so on. These "international" centers are also key nodes of global publishing business. Whereas "peripheral" refers to cities with less literary capital that lie outside of the central nodes of global publishing. Once the characteristics of both "international" and "peripheral" writers' festivals are established, these categories will be applied to evaluate the following proposition: The popularity and expanded function of the majority of writers' festivals have magnified their role as important sites of public culture – not least because they orchestrate a wide range of connections between writers, the media, and the wider public.

Writers' Festivals and Geography

Pascale Casanova's theory of world literature categorizes works of literature as either high art representative of a universal appeal and recognition, or low art that is likely to be informed by national or regional interests. Her theory is distinct from other world literary theories that attempt to categorize the shifts within literature where particular books or genres of writing have spread across geographic regions, or the means of producing, promoting and circulating a book have altered trends in readership (Moretti). Casanova's concept of world literature maps an international hierarchy of cities based on their amassed literary heritage measured as an account of the city's literary capital. Her claim is that "there exists a literary world – a literary universe relatively independent of the everyday world and its political divisions, whose boundaries and operational laws are not reducible to a national or regional politics" (5). While Casanova's research has been legitimately critiqued as Eurocentric,[2] the account she presents of "international literary space" is useful for analyzing the literary heritage of writers' festivals.

In *The World Republic of Letters*, Casanova claims that obtaining the desired "universal" literary status is an aesthetic quality consecrated by people and groups that are accountable for maintaining literature's denationalized, and therefore autonomous, values. Paris is considered the geographic center for the expression and consecration of these universal values, followed by New York, London, Berlin, Barcelona, and so on.[3] The quality of universality attributed to works of literature from anywhere in the world is therefore maintained and negotiated between these cities, in a process

Casanova theorizes as defining "the present of modern literature."[4] This hierarchy of world literature Casanova constructs as a "worldwide reality" (5), and she employs it as a system where the dominant literary "centers" provide dependent "peripheral centers" with the theoretical and aesthetic models for autonomous literary production as well as the publishing networks and critical functions for authors to become universally recognized (109). For example, the geography of international literary space, Casanova argues, makes it possible to connect "James Joyce, an Irishman, with Arno Schmidt, a German, or with the Serb Danilo Kis and the Argentine Jorge Luis Borges; or Umberto Eco, an Italian, with the Spaniard Arturo Perez-Reverte and the Serbian Milarad Pavic" because they have been consecrated as possessing a universal literary aesthetic (101).

Toronto in Canada is an example of an international literary space that is also host to a writers' festival widely recognized as the world's most elite literary event (Tepper). According to Casanova, Toronto is a city that operates as a competitive space in the hierarchy of world literature because it leverages the value of operating between two of the world's largest English language international literary spaces, New York and London (123). While Toronto is dependent on New York and London for its literary power[5] (a power further bolstered by Canada's combined English and French colonial heritages), the city has also accumulated its own measure of literary capital, and therefore autonomy, of which the widespread recognition of Toronto's International Festival of Authors (IFOA) as the world's most prestigious writers' festival is symbolic. Toronto and the festival, then, arguably exercise a measure of influence over the international circulation of literature, and as such, act as consecrating powers in the negotiation of the ever shifting definition of a denationalized universal literature. The festival's maintenance of a denationalized identity is curiously evident in the fact that references to Toronto are absent from the festival's title as well as from the event's promotional material. It is only in the fine print of the festival's poster that the event can be physically located.

Because writers' festivals and other commentators adopt the critical category of universal literature to surpass the confines of national boundaries, the values to which they are looking are ultimately a measure that rests on the same vague, but identifiable, forces of the shifting sites of literary consecration. This literary capital, Casanova claims, is possible:

> by virtue of the very belief that sustains it and of the real and tangible effects of this belief, which supports the functioning of the entire literary world. All participants [who look to this space] have in common a belief in the value of this asset – an asset that not everyone possesses, or at least not to the same degree, and for the possession for which everyone is prepared to struggle. (17)

While it can be argued that cities like Toronto occupy an international literary space based on Casanova's aesthetic notion of literary capital, this is only the foundation, or

partial account, of the dominant forces constructing the international prominence of these cities as powers able to confer universality on certain works of literature.

Concomitant with the consecrating power of literary capital is the power of the global publishing industry – to which Casanova devotes too little attention (Stewart, *Culture*, 121). This is especially relevant to writers' festivals because book publishers are currently their most influential stakeholders. Book publishers invest in writers' festivals as cost-effective promotion channels for books and their authors. Writers' festivals assist the commercial aims of publishers by attracting live audiences and by producing content about authors' personal lives and their writing that can be easily circulated in today's personality- and image-driven media. Multinational book publishers in particular are influential stakeholders because they represent the great majority of published authors and frequently finance these authors to attend festivals. Moreover, multinational publishers are important given they can also act as gatekeepers preventing authors' inclusion in festivals as well as the media (not least because the major book publishers are owned by media conglomerates[6]). While there are other financial investors in writers' festivals – often government agencies, industry partners, sponsors and donors, who together are likely to represent a greater financial income for writers' festival organizations – these investors do not have the stranglehold over writers' festivals that book publishers do.

Interestingly, the rise and rise of writers' festivals can be traced over time as a product of the booms, mergers and busts of the publishing industry. The publishing boom of the 1980s meant publishing firms were considered valuable assets and were the successful targets of media industry mergers. Then, by the 1990s, the economy went into recession and the number of independent publishing firms continued to decrease, as they had since the 1980s but for independent financial reasons (Starke 162). Subsequently, the need to meet the financial targets of large media conglomerates has meant that publishing firms are always in pursuit of the next "bestseller." Publishers' focus on finding the next bestseller, and extensively promoting it through events such as writers' festivals, is a widely recorded characteristic of contemporary publishing (Turner et al.; English and Frow; Moran, *Star Authors*).

Since the 1980s, therefore, writers' festivals have been used by multinational book publishers as promotional tools for branding literature as a niche cultural and even niche publishing market product. And through writers' festivals, authors can be assisted to reach or capitalize on their bestseller status by being transformed into celebrities. Indeed, the marketing focus on bestsellers at writers' festivals (and wherever else they can be promoted), some argue, has significantly contributed to a situation where the decisions to publish an author's work is no longer based on its inherent literary value but on the author's market appeal (Turner et al.; English and Frow; Lurie; Starke 226). While the influence of media and media corporations on both the mass and marginal fields of literature's production and consumption is well recognized – and evident here through an analysis of peripheral and international writers' festivals – a later section of this chapter will ask: To what degree will these large publishers

be the future of writing and publishing, and then, who might become the major stakeholder in writers' festivals?

Peripheral and International Writers' Festivals

The majority of writers' festivals today take place in peripheral locations. The Hay Festival of Literature in Wales and the Edinburgh Book Festival in Scotland are among the most acclaimed peripheral writers' festivals. A paradise for its 60,000 bookish visitors, the Hay Festival is held in the small 1,500-resident town of Hay-on-Wye where 30 bookstores engulf the quaint town center. The Edinburgh Book Festival attracts over 200,000 visitors and boasts a comprehensive and imaginative program of songwriters and comedians as well as literary prose writers and poets.[7] Beyond these festivals, there are many lesser known peripheral festivals mushrooming in ever more regions across the globe. The Hay Festival itself has expanded to become a franchise of writers' festivals delivering 15 festivals across five of the world's continents. These peripheral festivals tend to program a wide pool of available talent, from literary fiction authors and poets to bloggers, musicians, comedians and public figures more generally.

Writers' festivals that take place in international centers of literary production and circulation tend to focus on literary prose and poetry and position themselves as elite sites in world literature. The IFOA in Toronto, for instance, has a mission to "present the best of the world's literature to the city." Similarly, the International Literature Festival in Berlin claims to be "a crossroads for world literature." Neither London nor New York, the other two English-speaking international literary spaces, is host to an established writers' festival. The New Yorker Festival, nevertheless, reflects some of the attributes of "international" writers' festivals. For example, the 2012 New Yorker Festival programmed literary authors, including many of the world's most recognized literary heavyweights – Martin Amis, Zadie Smith, Margaret Atwood, Orhan Pamuk, Junot Diaz, Jonathan Safran Foer and Salman Rushdie – among its larger program of creative talent.[8]

In addition to the kinds of authors programmed by international and peripheral festivals, there is also a distinction in the content presented and generated at these events (Stewart, *Culture*). International festivals engage almost exclusively in a literary discourse in keeping with their quest for an imprimatur of autonomy and universality. Authors at international festivals are also more likely to be recognized in the media for their ideas and writing rather than their biographies or personalities: a distinction that has been made between literary celebrities and ordinary celebrities (Ommundsen, "From the Altar" and "Sex, Soap and Sainthood"; Moran, "Reign of Hype" and *Star Authors*; English and Frow). Peripheral festivals similarly engage in literary ideas and issues, but beyond these topics they discuss and debate national and regional topics: that is, local topics often linked to the host city or region and a mix of political ideas. Peripheral festivals also tend to engage in and produce a wide

range of celebrity culture products. Therefore, the content typical of writers' festivals can be considered across three prominent themes: the nature of the literary; the products and uses of celebrity; and local issues orientated around ideas about place and politics.

The recognition and elevation of literariness and literary values is the founding discourse of writers' festivals, and continues as the dominant discourse in international writers' festivals (Stewart, *Culture*). The literary discourse of writers' festivals seeks to establish literature's and literary authors' authoritative role in telling moral truths, and works to project these moral truths as qualities valid on a universal scale. One example of how this is achieved is for festival presenters to locate literature's morality in the textual practices of reading, where the reader's struggle to comprehend a narrative is said to be a process of expanding the reader's imaginative, and therefore moral, capacity: novels, for instance, are often described as creating for people experiences of what it is like to live another's life. These moral truths typically range over universally recognizable topics such as love, marriage, tragedy, redemption, death, guilt, faith, sex, memory, repression, and violence, to name a few, and are the symbols of Casanova's autonomous world literature – a literature free from political boundaries and local histories.

Discussion about literature's universality at writers' festivals also serves a marketing function. It elevates and distinguishes notions about literariness and the literary authors above and apart from other forms of writing, as well as other writers and public figures. The founding director of Toronto's International Festival of Authors illustrates this distinction in his comment:

> As Susan Sontag said to me, and Antonio Byatt said to me, and Cass Phillips: I always come to Harbourfront [the IFOA] because it is unapologetically literary. They hated Hay-on-Wye, they didn't want to be on the same stage as Bill Clinton and Margaret Thatcher. . . . I've fought off the golf writers and politicians. That's like saying we'll only get poetry that rhymes so we can get more people interested in it. (Greg Gatenby, interview with the author, 2007)

Attitudes like Gatenby's not only afford international festivals their reputation as consecrating powers of an elite and universal literature, but position international festivals as powerful marketing and branding tools for literature globally. These festivals blend Casanova's aesthetically defined international literary space with the commercial agenda of the major multinational publishers that aim to build a global readership for their growing range of multicultural books.[9] Rob Firing, a publicist for HarperCollins Canada, expressed this universalizing objective of multinational publishers' investment in writers' festivals in the remark: "What is most important is the international aspect [of festivals]: we get these books from all around the world that we've always published but which are pretty difficult to put in front of the audience that should get a hold of them." The role of an international writers' festival as a global literary brand, therefore, is to present an ever widening range of literature,

through ever more media channels, to an elite, virtually connected, international community of readers.

A second topic evident in both international and peripheral writers' festivals is celebrity culture. Celebrity culture is often symbolized by reference to "star" authors and synonymous with the public's interest in the author's life and personality in addition to – if not more than – their writing (Ommundsen, "Sex, Soap and Sainthood" and "From the Altar"; Moran, "Reign of Hype" and *Star Authors*). Literary celebrity, as opposed to ordinary forms of celebrity, is premised on public recognition of an author's literary achievements, and the transformation of these achievements into a measure of commercial success. Ommundsen theorizes the relationship between literary celebrity and commerce as follows: "The notion of the author as cultural hero unsullied by the manipulations of commercial or popular culture, though seemingly in stark opposition to common ideas of celebrity, in fact works in conjunction with them to produce a distinct brand of fame" ("From the Altar," 247). Literary celebrity, described above as a brand that outwardly opposes yet employs commercial culture, is the mode of author celebrity strived for by international writers' festivals because it elevates notions of literariness. Authors create themselves in this mode of celebrity by describing their unique and important role in telling universal moral truths, and often position these ideas alongside claims about how today's media trivializes literature.

Alternatively, ordinary forms of celebrity culture evident at writers' festivals, and especially peripheral writers' festivals, embrace the more common image- and personality-driven media interests (Stewart, *Culture*). Ordinary celebrity draws on the public's desire to engage with the author's emotions as well as their personality and biography as valid sources of aesthetic experience and knowledge. Engaging with this popular mode of celebrity connects authors and books to a broader public by engaging in the ideas, passions and enthusiasms the wider public is most interested in (Redmond).

An example of ordinary celebrity operating at writers' festivals is the expression of sincerity, dubbed the "celebrity confessional" (Littler). This kind of celebrity typically operates through the combination of reflections about the nuisances of being a pubic figure, emotional interiority, and self-criticism, where the public is "invited to feel with their feelings" (13). Celebrity confessional is also a mode where authors are likely to speak honestly about their personal struggles, their humble beginnings and the hardships they have faced on their unexpected pathway to recognition. This process of the celebrity confessional Littler observes as "anchoring the celebrity's image in relation to a real moment before fame that invites us to feel closer to celebrities and suggests our proximity to their emotions" (18). In this respect, the personal struggles and lives of star authors set up in a confessional mode create a space of intimacy capable of engaging audiences who may not be interested exclusively in a book's text.

Local issues are the final prominent theme of writers' festivals: a theme orientated around ideas of place and its politics. The discussion and debate of local issues is a

characteristic of peripheral writers' festivals and one that is notably absent at international writers' festivals. The discussion of local issues often focuses on regionally significant topical and current affair subjects, whereas international festivals suppress regional interests in order to maintain their distinction as "international literary spaces," thus retaining the power to sanctify particular works of literature as having universal appeal (Casanova).

Brisbane Writers' Festival in Australia is one of many possible examples of a peripheral festival addressing local issues (Stewart, *Culture*). Discussion and debate of local issues at this festival, and the inclusion of local authors writing about local places, has given the festival an ongoing role as a site where sociopolitical debate about the cultural significance of Brisbane, its history, politics and literature, remains significant. From profiling of a local engagement with national and international literary developments from as early as the 1960s, to addressing issues of popular interest to Brisbane audiences in the mid-1990s, the Brisbane Writers' Festival has created an account of the city's literary culture as well as commentary on the wider culture of the city, for half a century. Since the mid-1990s in particular, the festival has been a site where writing about Brisbane and the wider region, especially its distinctive form of party politics, has become a feature of the event. The discussion of these local issues highlights the significant civic role peripheral writers' festivals have grown to occupy as sites of public culture, and the idea of writers' festivals fulfilling a public culture function warrants further consideration.

Writers' Festivals as Sites of Public Culture

Critiques of writers' festivals rarely consider the festivals' role as democratic sites of public culture. Rather, writers' festivals, according to the majority of commentators, were once important and intimate sites of literary distinction that have more recently become sites of popular culture, characterized by commercial transactions and celebrity culture (Meehan; Lurie; Ommundsen, "From the Altar" and "Sex, Soap and Sainthood"). In these accounts, celebrity culture is thought to be a means employed to attract a wider and less discerning audience of lifestyle consumers rather than creative writers and serious bibliophiles. As previously noted, this idealized view of writers' festivals as literary events expresses a long held belief in the aesthetic and moral value of literature apart from, and often in contrast to, the regionalism of local issues and popular views of the media. In particular, it is the intertwining of the literary and media in contemporary culture that has underscored many of the issues emerging within and about writers' festivals in the last decade. These issues are the concerns Ommundsen identifies as contributing to the general anxieties about "ownership, value, and cultural capital" that play out at writers' festivals ("Literary Festivals").

To better theorize writers' festivals then, a more productive understanding of the role of literature in public culture is required. David Carter and Kay Ferres' definition of public culture is useful here because it includes "the 'work' that literature does in

the public sphere outside, but also through its aesthetic (or literary) credentials" (144). Public culture, or equally the public sphere,[10] as applied in this definition affords a more productive account of literature's application across literary, civic, and commercial realms.

Importantly, Carter and Ferres' definition of literature's public culture value extends to "something interconnected and extended through the media" (141), highlighting the democratic possibilities emerging through literature's increasingly interwoven relationship with the media. As discussed, one of these media strategies is an engagement with celebrity culture that most commonly manifests at writers' festivals through the promotion of authors' biographies and personalities. Through the production and circulation of celebrity content, writers' festivals contribute to a discourse of celebrity widely claimed to be the dominant site of social and cultural reproduction today (Redmond). Hence, the festivals' engagement with the media, and particularly the products and practices of celebrity culture, facilitate writers' festivals' accessibility as public events. So, rather than view the diversity of content now produced and circulated by most writers' festivals as contributing to the decline of public culture as other commentators have done, this chapter claims that this range of content forms the basis on which these events retain their relevance as accessible and diverse sites of a democratic public culture.

Writers' Festivals and the Digital

Established above is the current global topography of writers' festivals comprised of a handful of elite literary events located in world literary centers and an abundance of peripheral festivals that perform a broader public culture function. Also established is the current stranglehold of multinational publishers on the products of writers' festivals, including the mutually beneficial relationship publishers have with the media through their shared ownership by media conglomerates. The current topography of writers' festivals, however, is changing as book publishing continues to be disintermediated by digital technologies. As proposed earlier, it is important to consider the emerging context of writers' festivals by asking to what degree large publishers will be the future of writing and publishing, and then, who might become the major stakeholder in writers' festivals.

The disintermediated landscape of publishing refers to the fact that authors no longer need publishers or other intermediaries to reach readers. Once a publisher's coveted book deal provided respect, the printing press, distribution, marketing, royalties and readers, all critical to writers' ambitions. This has changed, and continues to change, with direct access to readers available through a combination of free and open digital platforms, web-based author services, and major e-book retailers – Apple, Barnes & Noble, Sony, Kobo, and Amazon – who are distributing independently produced e-books in a manner equal to those produced by large publishers (see Raccah, Crocker, Nash). Additionally, the number of strategies now available to connect

authors with readers has multiplied, and at the same time the profit margins of large publishers are shrinking and many of the biggest bricks-and-mortar bookselling franchises are bankrupt or possibly heading that way (Spector and Trachtenberg; Stafford). These trends suggest the book publishing industry has entered a digital era where a more level playing field between large, or traditional, publishing and independent publishing exists.

Writers' festivals have potential to flourish in this disintermediated landscape. In relation to both traditional and independent publishing, the challenge for authors of marketing and discovery in an age of content abundance is increasingly difficult (if:book Australia). Writers' festivals currently occupy this critical space for authors as established platforms that aggregate, curate, promote and deliver content to festival-going reading and writing communities as well as the wider public through the media. In other words, they are search-and-find mechanisms, performing an important role connecting authors and readers. To remain important and popular events in a digital era, writers' festivals will undoubtedly need to amplify authors' work in and across numerous live and digital formats and platforms. The future stakeholders for writers' festivals, therefore, will be businesses and individuals that have harnessed digital opportunities. These could be multinational book publishers, but it may be publishing businesses with new digitally savvy business models like Smashwords (Crocker), Lulu (which absorbed OpenMind, founded by Bradley Schultz and Paul Elliot), Cursor (Nash), or those yet to be identified. The risk of writers' festivals not embracing digital technologies, including partnering with successful digital businesses, is that more relevant events, such as the rapidly growing interactive component of the annual South by South West Festival in Austin, Texas, or the like, will take their place.

The final question raised about writers' festivals in our digital era is whether the distinction between international and peripheral writers' festivals is likely to remain. In a scenario where multinational publishing continues to shrink, and the stranglehold of multinational publishers on writers' festivals loosens, it is likely that the elite literary branding function of international writers' festivals will diminish. Early signs of this scenario may be evident as peripheral writers' festivals with broad public culture mandates grow rapidly in number and popularity, whereas international festivals that focus on literariness remain few in number and modest in size (Stewart, *Culture*). A shift in stakeholders may also allow more distinctive festival programs to emerge, as opposed to the existing practice where festivals tend to sequentially program authors who are on their international book tours. While the future of writers' festivals is yet to be determined, in the scenario painted above the success of writers' festivals depends on their ability to innovate, and specifically, on their ability to facilitate new partnerships able to produce digitally savvy products and services relevant to both writers and readers.

The rise and rise of writers' festivals is portrayed in this chapter as an expanding international topography of literary and broader public culture events, some of which have existed for over 50 years. While many commentators have criticized

writers' festivals for promoting a trivial and commercial culture around literature – "I have not read Arundhati Roy, but I have touched the hem of her garment" (Meehan 5) – this chapter illustrates that the popular approaches writers' festivals adopt to engage with writing and ideas contribute to their relevance as important and democratic sites of public culture.

We have seen that three themes are typically discussed and debated at writers' festivals: the nature of the literary; the products and uses of celebrity; and local issues orientated around ideas about the host city and its politics. International festivals focus on promoting literature's universal qualities expressive of morality and truth, and it is also more likely that the authors at these festivals will be promoted in the media as literary celebrities, that is, promoted for their writing talent rather than their image or personality. The most significant trend in writers' festivals, however, is the mushrooming number of festivals in peripheral centers. Peripheral writers' festivals tend to engage in discussions and debates across literary, celebrity, and the local themes. They also tend to feature a wide spectrum of writers and public speakers who elaborate on a wide range of topics. This content is typically promoted in the more ubiquitous image- and personality-driven media formats.

Today, multinational book publishers are the key stakeholder of writers' festivals, and particularly those identified as "international" because of their ability to brand literature as an elite global publishing product. As previously suggested, writers' festivals are a promotional investment for publishers, not only because they attract live audiences, but because they generate content about authors' personal lives and their writing that is easily circulated in the media. Nevertheless, as outlined above, the relationship between writers' festivals and multinational publishers will change, in small or large ways, as digital technologies continue to expand reading and writing possibilities.

Notes

1   "De-industrialization" is a concept Meehan employs to explain how the novel was first involved in a process of industrialization, where it became a depersonalized commercial product via its mass reproduction, whereas writers' festivals, conversely, are a process of reassuring the reader of authorial presence.

2   Casanova's theorization of an international literary space has been criticized from several valid perspectives. A principal critic of Casanova, Schulze-Engler, argues that a flaw in Casanova's argument is her understanding of modernity as a world system aspired to by the peripheral outsiders. In response, Schulze-Engler alternatively points to the forces oper-

ating toward diverse understandings of modernity, such as Eisenstadt's "multiple modernities" that offer models for a "de-centred modernity" (Schulze-Engler 4). This challenge to Casanova's Eurocentric position claims her work has the effect of flattening out political incursions and inroads of much of literature's postcolonial efforts.

3   Cities occupying positions in international literary space are equivalent to a kind of first tier of literary cities divided into different language groups. It is a concept further explained by Casanova in the following passage: "Each linguistic territory has a centre that controls and attracts the literary produc-

tion dependent on it. . . . London today, even if it now finds itself in competition with New York and Toronto, continues to be central for Australians, New Zealanders, Irish, Canadians, Indians, and English-speaking Africans; Barcelona, the intellectual capital of Spain, is the literary centre for South America; Paris is still the centre for writers from the West and North Africa as well as Francophone authors in Belgium, Switzerland, and Canada, countries where it continues to exercise influence by virtue of its literary eminence rather than any power of political control. Berlin is the leading capital for Austrian and Swiss writers and remains an important literary centre today for the countries of northern Europe as well as for the countries of central Europe that emerged from the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire" (116).

4   Paris, for instance, remains at the centre and symbolizes what Casanova terms "the Greenwich meridian" of literature, which is the meridian from which she defines the aesthetic distance of any literary work or corpus of works, measured by its temporal remove from "the present of literary creation," or Paris's literary present (88).

5   Toronto's strength as a competitive world literary center can be positioned in comparison to the "weakness" of Latin America, which author Antonio Candido described as the "the non-existence, dispersion, and weakness of publics disposed to literature, due to the small number of real readers . . . [and] the lack of the means of communication and diffusion . . . and finally, the impossibility, for writers, of specializing in their literary jobs, generally therefore realized as marginal, or even amateur, tasks" (Casanova 16). There is a weakness, however, in Casanova's account of the literary capital in Latin America: her research is most often conducted city by city (i.e. Paris, New York and Barcelona, as set out above), is inconsistent, and is often problematically interspersed with the more general regional boundary, Latin America.

6   At the end of the twentieth century the publishing industry was at once shrinking and globalizing. The main beneficiaries of mergers and takeovers from this time have been the media and entertainment industries. For instance, media conglomerate Bertelsmann took over Random House in 1998; similarly Verlagsgruppe Georg von Holtzbrinck purchased a majority stake in Macmillan, and News International made several acquisitions that amounted to the giant HarperCollins (Lee 21). Today the five largest trade publishers and their parent companies are Penguin (the Pearson Group), HarperCollins (News Corporation), Random House (Bertelsmann), Hachette Livre (Lagardère Group) and Pan Macmillan (van Holtzbrink), illustrating that this trend continues.

7   Importantly, audience numbers are only broadly indicative of a festival's popularity as each festival employs slightly different formulas for calculating attendance.

8   The New Yorker Festival also differs from writers' festivals because it is programmed by the staff writers of the *New Yorker* magazine and functions as a publicity and marketing exercise for this magazine.

9   The expansion of a multicultural "world literature," Graham Huggan argues in *The Postcolonial Exotic*, illustrates the assimilation tendencies entered into through the commerce of the "exotic" commodity to a Western literary market (suppressive of inequalities such as technology and labor, among others).

10   The ideas expressed in the term "public culture" have much in common with the concept of the "public sphere." Both have a normative interest in democracy and the promotion of democratic futures. Both are interested in the distinctions between high and popular culture, the role of institutions, the function of different regimes of value and consumption, and questions of class, race, and gender (Bennett and Carter 135). Public culture, however, does not necessarily share the same commitments, expressed in some public sphere research, to deliberation through consensus, rational norms of debate, or the necessity for particularized arenas of public activity (Habermas). Public culture is democratic rather than prescriptive in its orientation of the ways democracy should be pursued and achieved.

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18
Creative Writing Research

Graeme Harper

The term "creative writing research" can refer to research through the *undertaking* of creative writing, research *about* creative writing, or even research *using* creative writing. Or it can refer to a combination of these. Within, around, or in conjunction with any of these approaches creative writing research can involve investigations into the ways in which creative writing occurs, for the individual creative writer in particular – so, a creative writer exploring their own creative writing, through doing it, and through considering how they are doing it. That is often what creative writing research is about or what it primarily involves.

That said, the complexity of this is hidden by the simplicity of the explanation! For example, a creative writer might combine the creation of collection of poetry with their investigation of form, theme or themes, tones and/or voices, and use the practice of creative writing, its undertaking, to produce new knowledge. A creative writer might be interested in how a subject can be investigated or a theme explored in light of their personal history or in light of a cultural or social position – in other words, undertaking creative writing with a micro or macro focus on issues, ideas, attitudes. Or a creative writer might focus on structural or formal characteristics of the practice of creative writing itself, with theme and/or subject being secondary or somehow less focal than questions relating to process or composition or relationships in text, language or graphic design, for example. These are merely some possibilities.

With these things in mind, creative writing research can be described as individual and strongly situational,[1] on which I'll say more shortly. Put briefly, creative writing

research is situational in the sense that it is often produced *for* a specific, individual circumstance and it is often for a writer's specific situation or purpose. Such research and its results can of course be exchanged, discussed and communicated, during or after the undertaking – and the knowledge gained may be transferred to the wider community. The fact that creative writing research can be undertaken solely for a situation and for a personal circumstance encountered by an individual creative writer does not negate its importance to us more widely; nor does the fact that the knowledge explored and gained can be exchanged negate its importance to the individual who initiates or discovers it.

Practice-Led Research

Research through the *undertaking of creative writing* is often referred to as "practice-led research" in such countries as the United Kingdom and Australia (among a few others) where discussions of this kind of research as "practice-led research" have been strongly developing since the middle of the 1990s. Sometimes this research is referred to by other names, such as "research through practice" or "practice-based research" or "arts practice research," and there is some debate about whether one or other expression is a more accurate description of the activity. Research using creative practice in this way does indeed have many complexions. Not all of this research could be said to be "led" by practice. Likewise, not all of this research is overwhelmingly "based" in practice. Nor is such practice always a conduit "through" which research takes place.

The dimensions of this discussion are considerable because the styles, approaches, potential avenues of investigation, structures, outcomes, aims and objectives of creative practice are vast, as vast perhaps as there are numbers of individuals in the world to individually undertake these things, so it is entirely to be expected that practice-led research (as I will choose to call this, in shorthand) encompasses an almost limitless scope for conducting investigations.

Practice-led research in creative writing is most often defined by the nature of creative writing itself. That is, it embraces creative writing as an art using words; it is often formed around particular structural or formal properties that have been previously defined (for example, a practice-led research project based in the writing of "a novel," or a practice-led research project based in the writing of "a screenplay") and it aims to produce new knowledge that relates as much to the artifacts of creative writing (that is, the material results) as it does to the themes and subjects, the emotions, the observations, with which it engages. Some examples of projects in practice-led research in creative writing could include – and these are somewhat random and slimmed down to shorthand:

1   The writing of a historical novel as the focal creative exploration in the investigation of relationships between the creative writer's personal history and the history of a period, place or public event.

2   The writing of a collection of poems associated with different locations in the world and an attached investigation into the nature of the poetry of travel (present and past).

3   The application and testing of the narrative and character theories of Vladimir Propp in the construction of a collection of short stories.

4   An exploration of the role and representation of childhood in the first works of poets and fiction writers – targeting writers in a particular location and simultaneously creating a first work drawn from the writer's childhood experiences.

5   The writing of a screenplay set in a prison and a critical consideration of incarceration texts, from early prison works in poetry and prose to prison films.

6   A consideration of interactive texts through the creation of what will be called a "live graphic novel," featuring text and image.

7   The investigation of the race to interplanetary travel through a fictionalized account of the science and situation of twenty-first century space travel.

8   The site-specific installation of original poetry in a hospital environment and a consideration of the role of shape, color and text in the creation of emotional response.

9   A consideration of the role of character movement in the stage play, with a mapping of small and large directions onto story arcs and character development.

10 A comparative exploration of the hero in Young Adult Fiction through the creation of alternative storylines around the same set of circumstances.

Although practice-led research in creative writing has grown strongly in higher education since the early 1990s, such research can challenge some more general attitudes to university and college research found in the early twenty-first century. While practice-led research in creative writing can produce new knowledge, this new knowledge does not always appear to meet criteria set for what is sometimes called "knowledge transfer" (referring to exchanges between university researchers and the community or corporate world), or even certain ideals defining "value" that have occasionally influenced institutional and organizational research agendas in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Indeed, how this individual knowledge is grounded beyond the self (or very occasionally beyond the "selves") might not be as apparent as it is for other forms of knowledge in our universities and colleges.

These things in part explain why the notion of practice-led research in the arts has not yet been embraced globally, given some of the relationships formed between contemporary universities and the quantification of public and private investment in university research and the focus on such concepts as research "impact." Of course, creative writing exploring knowledge *for* a situation and *for* an individual does not mean this knowledge cannot be shared, move from individual to individual, or from individual to group. It does not mean such research cannot have wider "impact."

Rarely, if ever, is knowledge of use only to one person and only on one occasion. However, unlike work in fields of the physical, natural or medical sciences, even the social sciences and the humanities, there is still infrequent discussion of creative writers sharing their discoveries in other ways than the dissemination of completed works, or occasionally in "works-in-progress" (in an educational setting, for example). Yet, there is no doubt that creative writers frequently create new knowledge that can be exchanged in a wide variety of ways – new knowledge about creative writing itself, new knowledge about things in the world, new knowledge about human circumstances, feelings, dispositions, attitudes, new knowledge about our existence in relation to both the individual and the society or culture.

Research or Creative Activities?

Not always embracing "practice-led research" as a term, universities in some countries instead declare a difference between "academic research" and "creative activities." Universities in the United States have frequently done this. While this is not meant to create a hierarchy of knowledge, or necessarily a hierarchy of disciplinary importance within these institutions, it does place creative practice subjects in one category and "noncreative" subjects (as by inference others then become) in another category. This might not be entirely helpful.

Such a criticism is not made lightly here, and we currently see all around the globe the embracing of creative practice – and, in our particular focus here, the embracing of creative writing – within these university research environments, and considerable enthusiasm for the presence of creative practices on our higher education campuses. And yet, higher education funding, whether widely governmental or individually institutional, more often follows subjects that promise "hard research" results, so defined. Creative practice subjects are more often highly regarded because of their general worth to humanity than because they map well onto institutional research agendas or because they have potential for contributing to some governmentally determined "knowledge economy," as the realm incorporating higher education is sometimes labeled today. It could also be argued that the vibrancy of student numbers is more formally the primary support in our universities and colleges that continue to welcome creative practice subjects, rather than any notion of research contribution. Simply put, students sign up for learning these subjects – research is therefore not often seen as the focal reason for their existence on campus.

All of this is relevant in a discussion of creative writing research, not least because not everywhere in the world has so far embraced the notion actively and we might wonder why. Creative writing professors in the US are currently far less likely to talk about "practice-led research in creative writing" or even simply "creative writing research" than their counterparts in the United Kingdom. And yet, it is in the US that creative writing, at least creative writing in the English language, has the largest number of graduate students, the largest higher education focused association (the

Association of Writers and Writing Programs) and the most faculty working in and around universities and colleges.

The simple explanation for the difference between the US and the UK in this regard – and simply to take these two distinct national arenas – lies in the current prevalence of the studio modeled Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.) in the US, the more formal, course-imbued shape of the American Ph.D. and the concentration in British creative writing on the shorter M.A. and the British version of a Ph.D., which is primarily open project-based and less structured. That said, some of the perceived difference is actually a variation in nomenclature and the North American Ph.D. has for some years incorporated what British or Australian counterparts would call practice-led research, in the regular writing and submission of "creative dissertations" in American Ph.D. programs.

In the rest of the world, whether in the Asia-Pacific region, continental Europe, Africa, or beyond, there is quite a variation in engagement with creative writing research and, in fact, with creative writing in higher education generally – from avid involvement to a complete lack of involvement. This situation might well evolve, and I thus mention conditions now so that should someone be reading this chapter in the future these comments might be used to consider change in historical terms.

Critical Understanding

Practice-led research in creative writing is most often accompanied by some kind of critical writing. The same can be said also of practice-led research in other arts fields – in fine art, drama, filmmaking, and music, for example. The question is thus raised about what role this critical writing occupies in practice-led research (it could be raised similarly in creative practice generally, where *some* form of individual critical exploration quite frequently occupies a place in the practitioner's personal hinterland).

One argument raised in relation to practice-led research in creative writing is essentially that if new knowledge is displayed in the resultant creative works, then why does such research (in the form of a creative writing doctoral project, as one key example) need to include an *additional* piece of critical writing? The argument further suggests that this is paradoxical because the whole purpose of such research is to use the human practice that is creative writing to explore ideas and notions, and therefore surely the production of new creative writing is enough to qualify as a research result?

The alternative view often does not seek to directly counter this argument. Rather, the alternative view tends to be that while it is true that the completion of a piece of creative writing as a practice-led research project legitimately holds the research results in the creative work itself, an investigation of the research results is difficult to articulate only in that creative work. Because almost all practice-led research is undertaken in universities it becomes part of the research to critically approach that undertaken through creative means. This does not seek to deemphasize the central importance of those creative explorations; rather, it seeks to articulate (for examina-

tion, for example, in the case of later undergraduate work and of graduate work) the nature and results of the creative investigations. How it does this can itself be productively debated.

Ultimately, whether practice-led research in creative writing *needs* an attached piece of critical writing might not be the most useful question to advance either an individual's creative writer's knowledge or our wider knowledge of creative writing. The better question might be whether it (and the writer) *benefits* from the development of a piece of critical writing. This question goes well beyond the requirements of any formal university or college program. There are questions to consider about the nature and intent of such critical writing generally, and about the forms and styles of critical thought a creative writer might engage in, and with, both formally and informally. Practice-led research has tended to bring to the fore such questions about the relationships between creative practice and critical understanding, and it has tended to point out differing ways of considering these relationships.

Reflection, Reflexivity, Response

It has been suggested that critical writing in creative writing research is "reflective." By this is meant that this writing involves the creative writer reflecting on their practice and/or the works emerging from it and, through this reflection, coming to better understand both their own work and, potentially, creative writing more widely. Undoubtedly, the idea that creative writers can benefit from engaging in reflection is uncontroversial; or *relatively* uncontroversial, more accurately. That is, if reflection is taken to be something along the lines of contemplative consideration then it's fairly certain it's seen as a positive exercise – though, indeed, some might argue something along the lines of "thinking too hard on creative practice stifles creative practice."

I offer the latter merely as a paraphrase, a summary of a potential criticism. Whether such emerges from an accurate understanding of creativity or of creative practice is another thing. Perhaps it comes about because of a certain sense of creativity as mysterious or unfathomable; as unassailable or unapproachable; or, indeed, as importantly delicate. Or all of these things! Perhaps reflection denies some of our more spontaneous, instinctive, unpremeditated human actions. Overall, though, reflection in creative writing research is recorded as largely a positive thing. However, is the idea of "reflection" really an accurate description of what is occurring in this kind of critical writing?

Leaving that question aside for a moment, another way of describing the critical work connected to practice-led research is to say that this work is "reflexive." Though similar in sound and appearance, "reflective" and "reflexive" differ in that reflexive critical writing aims to combine a self-referential inquiry with a sense of circular cause and effect. Whereas in reflective critical work a writer might approach, through contemplation, their practice and its results, in reflexive writing the suggestion is that cause and effect will be the principal driver and through self-reference, both to actions

and outcomes, the creative writer will produce critical insights into their creative writing.

Both reflective and reflexive critical writing have merit. Both notions follow strands of creative writing activity, and the work of writers in considering their actions and the results of those actions. But both notions also leave out much, and because the idea of research is to test, and unearth and contribute to human knowledge, if we're to reach some sense of how critical writing on practice-led research works we need to consider things further.

The role of situational knowledge in creative writing has already been highlighted. Similarly, a sense in which practice-led research can result in transferable knowledge (between creative writers, between creative writers and others) has also been mentioned. But the core of activity here relates to understanding and because creative writers seek understanding that is of the most use to them in their work it seems clear that simply reflection or even circular reflexivity does not offer the strongest possibilities. Alternatively, the concept and application of "response" offers much more. By responsive critical understanding I refer to that kind of critical thinking that aims to provide a result – a pragmatic result, indeed, but with the added potential to offer wider critical or theoretical insights relating to creative writing. Critical writing attached to practice-led research has the potential to be this kind of work.

Viewing the critical work associated with practice-led research in creative writing as responsive writing incorporates both the reflective and the reflexive, while at the same time raising questions about the nature of the critical understanding with which we creative writers engage. If creative writers were only to reflect, then no action would result. This might appear to be taking the idea of reflection too literally; however, that is indeed reflection's key intention: to contemplate. Similarly, if creative writers were only to act in reflexive ways then it would be the idea of cause and effect that would be the driver, and deviation from this, or from the self-referential sense in which reflexivity proceeds, would also be out of keeping.

Responsive critical understanding is not only about contemplation and/or about discernible or potential cause and effect. Responsive writing entails both a backward gaze and a forward trajectory. It involves speculative investigation empowered by creative intention, and it aims to articulate both what has occurred in any piece of creative writing research and what these occurrences might offer.

In this respect, responsive work in practice-led research can literally or metaphorically connect itself with the creative work to which it responds. It does not limit itself to one plane of reference in that regard. The purpose of this critical writing is to provide as genuine an insight as humanly possible into the creative work, rather than to match other forms of critical writing which we might encounter regularly in academe. The approach, therefore, is to seek out the nature of the knowledge employed, discovered and/or advanced in the creative work and to use a critical response to locate and explore this knowledge.

Similarly, a critical response in creative writing research can directly address the question of individual writerly need – whether in an immediate situation or in refer-

ence to the wider development of writing skills, knowledge about subjects or themes, understanding of the past and present in the genre in which the writer is working, reference to publishing or performing industry wants or needs, consideration of the relationship with other arts or other subjects of human inquiry, and so on. Because responsiveness is not limited to one model of action or one plain of reference, the key to this kind of critical work is the fluidity of the relationship between creative work and critical response.

None of this is to suggest that critical response in practice-led research in creative writing is merely a case of declaring "anything goes" and all will then shake out into concerted research. Rather, it is to suggest that the forms of critical discourse that attach themselves to other subjects in our universities might not be directly suited to critical writing attached to creative writing, though they can certainly form the basis of synthesis or even of useful contrast. In addition, critical response in creative writing offers the opportunity for an additional exploration of (and through) the creative, not so much resulting in a separate piece of work but recognizing this critical writing as another form of exploration brought about by the creative writing.

Research *about* Creative Writing

Not all creative writing research is practice-led research in creative writing, involving creative practice supported by a critical response. Creative writing research can also be research about creative writing, not involving the practice itself. The question of what constitutes such research is slightly vexed. How can we define what *is* research about creative writing and what is *not* research about creative writing? For example, because the practice of creative writing has frequently produced forms of literature, is research about literature therefore research about creative writing? If so, does that only involve research focused on works of literature that have been published and distributed? The illogic of that is immediately obvious; after all, publishing and the activities of publication are not directly interchangeable with the activities of creative writing. So to research about creative writing by looking *only* at published works would not be to research creative writing but only to research a *certain* result of undertaking creative writing.

Researching only published works of creative writing is not illegitimate, of course. It is not without the potential to contribute to our understanding – far from it! But it is an incomplete approach to considering creative writing and thus potentially skews our understanding of creative writing. That is not the same as failing to contribute to our understanding, of course; but this skewing does need to be noted and kept in mind. The same can be said about researching creative writing only by considering the finished works of authors, or only by considering the works of well-known or celebrated authors. All these types of research have the potential to bring about new knowledge, but all are missing or failing to consider key aspects of creative

writing, and in that regard none are adequate methods of researching about creative writing, in themselves.

Those researching about creative writing therefore need to consider that creative writing involves a complex set of actions and results, and therefore that to fully research creative writing is bound to involve a breadth and depth of considerations, some of which can include researching:

1 the physical activities involved in undertaking creative writing;
2 the artifacts produced by creative writers: drafts, finished works, notes, diaries, doodles and marginalia, secondary works written alongside primary works, formal and informal communications;
3 habitats and conditions under which creative writing has taken place;
4 the psychological and dispositional aspects of individual creative writers, or a group of creative writers, comparatively, over time or place;
5 cultural and societal influences on creative writing practice and the creation of works;
6 the contemporary creative industries entered by some creative writing and to which some creative writing contributes;
7 processes of learning creative writing, whether formal or informal;
8 the tools for creative writing, and their impact on practice;
9 historical change and context in relation to aspects of creative writing – such as what is written, why and by whom for whom;
10 the range of knowledge, the disciplinary contributions, made to any undertaking by creative writing and its results.

This is a selection of possible avenues of investigation, but not a complete list. The aspects here are possible directions, speculative rather than comprehensive – because, to write *about* creative writing a researcher does need to start by considering what they believe are the key aspects of creative writing as a human practice and what are the results of this practice, as they pertain to the actions of creative writing itself. The answer to that question is as individual as it can be in any other form of research or, indeed, in practice-led research in creative writing. Needless to say, human actions are not often best approached by limiting the avenues of investigation, and with something as decidedly human as creative writing it is certain than the best research about it is the research that begins by understanding this fact.

Research *Using* Creative Writing

Research *led by* or *through* the practice of creative writing and research that is *about* creative writing: both frequently appear today on the radar of creative writing research. But creative writing is also a very widely undertaken human practice beyond research, and a practice for which many of us have considerable passion, regardless of whether

it forms research or can be researched. With these things in mind, it is also possible for creative writing to be used *in* research – as a research tool, as a method of unearthing knowledge about other things, as a partner with other methods or strategies for investigating or uncovering greater understanding. A human practice that is as widely welcomed and undertaken as creative writing has obvious potential for actively engaging research participants and audiences. Furthermore, creative writing combines human knowledge and human emotion, feeling as well as understanding, so it creates investigative bridges that many research methodologies cannot hope to create.

Creative writing therefore has been used in research about communities, whether based on geography or based on shared cultural and/or experiential histories. It has been used in specific environments to investigate or record experiences and attitudes and to provide an exploratory medium for the context of place or identity or situation – such as creative writing in healthcare or creative writing in educational settings or creative writing in prisons. And it has been used with particular aims in mind, such as creative writing for self-development or creative writing for exploring a second language or creative writing to record impressions of an event or historical moment.

Using creative writing in research this way reminds us that creative writing is actions as well as results, and thus it can be applied to research as well as be seen as research or be researched. To consider creative writing as research method, as well as creative writing research methods, is not really unusual given that many of the arts have been used to investigate our world, and to speculate on ideas and reactions to our lives. Similarly, it reminds us that whatever divisions we see in contemporary universities between disciplines or fields of knowledge are quite often not as productive as the sharing of methods and results across disciplinary borders and between approaches. In that respect, because creative writing almost always crosses some kind of disciplinary boundaries, it is human practice imbued with a philosophy of exchange, and that explicitly includes open exchange between methods and outcomes.

The Excitement and the Challenges

Creative writing is first and foremost human action. Despite the vast number of works resulting from creative writing that have been published and performed, that have gone down in history and been shared between individuals and, indeed, communities and nations, the fact remains that creative writing is more action than it is its artifacts, more our individual human activities than it is the material results of these activities.

On the one hand, this is a daunting thought, to imagine that with the considerable history of literature, the theater, film and television, music, computer games and interactive media, the public arts and more – that even if this vast history of outcomes of the human practice of creative writing were sitting all around us there would still be more to be considered that has not been considered when it comes to creative writing. On the other hand, it is extremely exciting to recognize that in reality we

know so very little so far about creative writing that, whatever the future holds for the current material evidence of us undertaking creative writing, we can be certain that for the activities of creative writing it holds much more.

This is not to suggest that some of the current well-known outcomes of creative writing are absolutely destined to slip away into human history – such things as the novel, the poem, the film script, for example. But it is to say that if we see creative writing primarily as its material results – which given it cannot exist without human action would seem almost impossible to do, yet has seemingly occurred so frequently where investigations of creative writing have begun with the end results and worked backwards to speculate on how these were produced – then material change must by inference challenge its continuity.

If we more accurately recognize that creative writing is human action, and its material results come about at one time or another because of these actions, and these results are many and varied (in the current world: earlier drafts, emails, doodles and manuscript marginalia, final drafts, published works, diaries, letters, text messages, and more), then the remarkable continuity and evolution of creative writing can be our focus, not the continuance or potential demise of particular material forms we recognize in the contemporary world or from the past.

If we recognize that creative writing is action and the artifacts produced by this action are many, we can also plot out its embracing across many cultures, and compare and contrast how it has been manifest, how it has evolved, and where and how it is evolving. In doing this we can also consider how creative writing – which in all cases involves the combination of communication and art, and the predominance of words in making this combination –represents a distinctively human trait and in what ways this trait might relate to our distinctiveness as a species.

This all goes beyond the foundation of national or regional language, and the linguistic heritages of groups. If creative writing has appeared, much like many of the arts, throughout history and in a vast number of cultures, locations and communities, then logic suggests there must be something about it that is innately human. That being the case, and creative writing being our primary art form utilizing words, then something about the bonds, expressions, sign systems, and shared understandings between humans is contained in our decidedly human practice of creative writing.

The challenges for creative writing research are many in light of this. Whatever we leave out potentially skews our understanding. This I have already noted in relation to the inclusion of finished works over unfinished works, but it is also the case in the exclusion of our minute personal actions but the inclusion of cultural forces, the inclusion of our individual history but the exclusion of societal change, a concentration on form but a lack of attention to subject and theme, the role of the publishing industry but no attention to the role of mechanical tools of composition, and so on. Writing in his *The Bread of Time: Toward an Autobiography*, Pulitzer Prize winner and Poet Laureate of the United States of America (2011–2012) Philip Levine exposes some of the context we encounter when we undertake or consider creative writing. He writes:

That autumn I found poetry. After dark, ambling the deserted streets, I would speak to the moon and stars about the emotional revolution that was raging within me, and, true to their natures, the moon and stars would not answer. My most intimate poems were summoned by the promise of air or the odors of its aftermath. Night after night I spun and respun these poems – if poems they were – none of which I ever committed to the page. I was learning to love solitude and to discover the power of my voice to deprive it of terror; I was learning how to become one man in a sea of men and women who by some mystery came together to form a brotherhood and sisterhood of all those beings with souls. (44)

Just in this small excerpt we see in Levine's beginning of creative writing just how much is brought to it, how much is considered when undertaking it, and how much might possibly emerge from any individual instance of doing it. We see too in this case, interestingly, that the "material" results are intriguingly not material at all – but that Levine still considers he is writing poetry, even if this poetry is not "committed to the page." The point I would hope is well made in this: creative writing is human action involving the use of words for art and communication, and how it is inscribed, how it comes into physical being, is only one element of this human activity, and sometimes not even the defining element. To research this – to gain new knowledge about creative writing, to challenge assumptions or confirm ideas about creative writing – is filled with such possibilities!

Conclusion

In whatever ways creative writing research is approached, one thing is certain: it needs to be undertaken with an openness to connections and exchanges of knowledge and understanding, a willingness to employ any number of investigative tools, from the undertaking of creative writing itself, in one or many more ways with one or many more aims, to the consideration of its actions and results in their manifest forms. Creative writing research might not be described as such in every environment in which it is currently being undertaken – particularly taking into account that a great deal of this is occurring in academic environments and that there are variations in national academic histories and traditions when it comes to creative writing. But we might also think about how often creative writers engage in forms of critical writing and how much this critical writing represents the critical considerations of creative writers in relation to their own writing and in relation to creative writing generally. Creative writing is additionally employable, and has been employed, as research methodology for other investigations – not least because it so strongly draws together human traits and provides cross-disciplinary bridges when it comes to shapes and styles of human knowledge. Finally, creative writing research benefits our past, present and future human interest in creative writing because it increases our knowledge of how, why and when creative writing takes place, it adds additional thought and

understanding as to who undertakes it, and gives voice not only to the physical mani-
festations of this human practice but to the emotional, dispositional and contextual
reasons behind it, so that we might better come to recognize what it is about creative
writing that we humans value and continue to explore.

NOTE

1   For a discussion of situational knowledge see
    "Creative Writing Research" in Donnelly and
    Harper 107.

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19
Literary Prizes and Awards

Claire Squires

In a series of witty and perceptive vignettes of "literary life" published in the *Guardian* newspaper in the early 2000s, the cartoonist Posy Simmonds relates the lot of the contemporary creative writer, be it in front of the computer, at a book signing or launch party, or anxiously reading reviews at the breakfast table. One of the cartoons, "Dry Runs", depicts six writers, each of whom – it is implied – has been shortlisted for a major literary award. In the privacy of the bathroom, each rehearses his or her acceptance speech, should he or she be named, later that day, the winner of the prize.

Simmonds's imagined writers represent a number of different authorial and demographic stereotypes; among them, a middle-class woman surrounded by the trappings of a domestic life (clothes drying on the radiator, a children's potty, a rubber duck); an older, portly man in evening wear and bow-tie, his speech stuffed with half-remembered literary allusions; and a younger man in a public toilet, wearing an unkempt T-shirt and jeans (but suit on a hanger behind him), swearing down his mobile phone in anger (and intimated nervousness) at the ceremony that awaits him.

These imagined moments reveal, in satirical fashion, the importance of the literary award scene to writers and the publishing industry, and the tensions that arise because of it. Highly visible and financially remunerative prizes such as the Man Booker reward authors economically and promote further sales of their titles. They also function as shorthand for literary merit, although this shorthand is frequently questioned and contested, as another of Simmonds's shortlisted authors demonstrates. This author complicates the link between the recognition that a big literary award offers, and its

financial and promotional return. Her bathroom rehearsal tests out the words, "I was in two minds when my book was nominated . . . what if I won? For once in my career I'd have something tantamount to a BEST SELLER." She continues in cynical and aphoristic vein: "A BEST SELLER: 'The gilded tomb of a mediocre talent' as Logan Pearsall Smith had it." Her rehearsal suggests that literary prizes are an intrinsic part of the commercialized literary marketplace, an argument that goes hand-in-hand with a perennial debate about popularity, readability, and literariness. Literary awards are very centrally situated as part of the literary marketplace and the world of authorship and publication. Authors and publishers use the details of their successes (wins and sometimes shortlistings) in the paratexts of books: on covers and jackets, in press releases and sales materials, and on websites (Squires, *Marketing Literature*). Guide-books for authors such as the *Writers' and Artists' Yearbook* and *The Writer's Handbook* include lengthy lists of prizes and awards for which authors can be entered.

This chapter focuses on the conferral of literary awards and prizes, examining their history and development, and their role and function in the contemporary world of writing and publishing, and explores some of the issues surrounding their interventions in that world, including the question of the relationship between literary and economic value. It begins with an examination of the history and development of literary prize culture, and the debate and scholarship it has accrued. Subsequently, the chapter explores the role that literary prizes play within the literary marketplace and the economics of authorship, and contemporary literary prize culture, including the Booker Prize and its competitors.

The History and Development of Literary Prize Culture and Scholarship

In his capacious study of literary and cultural awards *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value*, James F. English traces the lineage of such prizes as far back "at least to the Greek drama and arts competitions in the sixth century BC, to the classical and medieval competitions in architecture, and to the musical-composition prizes, university essay prizes, and other sorts of cultural awards which were established by the early Renaissance," and then their acceleration via "the rise of royal and national academies and then of professional associations and learned societies from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries" (1–2). Notwithstanding these precedents, English identifies a "wild proliferation" in the number of cultural awards from the beginning of the twentieth century onward, identifying broader macroeconomic and cultural factors alongside the specific moment of the 1901 Nobel Prize for Literature, "perhaps the oldest prize that strikes us as fully contemporary" and, English argues, the progenitor of the Goncourt, Femina, and Pulitzer prizes in France and America, after which an exponential growth in the number of literary awards can be identified (3, 28).

The theoretical approach to the history and analysis of cultural awards that English develops derives from Bourdieu's field of cultural production, which contrasts economic and cultural capital. The former defines capital in terms of, for example, sales figures or box-office takings, whereas the latter relates to recognition unconnected to the marketplace, for example reviews, recognition by other writers, and cultural awards (a conceptualization in direct opposition to the satirical rehearsal in the bathroom and its understanding that the award is likely to produce a bestseller). English introduces a third term, however, in order to articulate the workings of the late twentieth-century cultural award: that of "journalistic capital (visibility, celebrity, scandal)"; in other words the marketability of the award and its winners – an aspect which this chapter explores in more detail later (English, "Winning," 123). English's theoretical framework is a productive one in understanding how literary prizes might function as indicators of both commercial and artistic success via their location as part of the larger structures of the literary marketplace, as the workings of those prizes, and reactions to them, reveal.

Additional scholarly approaches to literary prizes, and the construction of their histories, have been developed. Scholarship has been based on archival records where they are available, although traces of the judging process itself are often hard to discern, as the discussions that lead to the decisions are rarely recorded. Todd has written at length about the Booker Prize, and others have also contributed to its study, sometimes in comparison to the Prix Goncourt (Todd, *Consuming Fictions* and "How Has the Booker Prize Changed"; Cachin and Ducas-Spaes; Norris, "Recontextualising the Booker"; Pickford). Branco investigated the moment of the literary award ceremony, and specifically the acceptance speech, from the perspective of spectacle and event; an academic study of the same moment depicted by Simmonds's cartoon, in other words. Anand and Jones also analyzed the "tournament ritual" of the Booker award ceremony, using analysis of media reports and other archival material. Huggan's critique of the "postcolonial exotic" situates literary prizes, and specifically the Booker Prize, within a postcolonial discourse, as does Luke Strongman in *The Booker Prize and the Legacy of Empire*, although with more of a literary critical approach, with less focus on the material conditions and circumstances surrounding the prize. In "A Common Ground? Book Prize Culture in Europe" (Squires) I argue that investigations of literary prizes could be oriented through the revised book communications circuit developed by Adams and Barker, examining their impact not solely on reception (where they might commonly be thought to have their greatest role), but also on publication, manufacture, distribution, and survival, as a prize influences, and sometimes even funds, the ongoing cycle of the book. In this article, I cited English's prior argument that "There is no form of cultural capital so ubiquitous, so powerful, so widely talked about, and yet so little explored by scholars as the cultural prize" (English, "Winning," 109). English's own substantial study has done much to change this, but the other work referred to here has also undoubtedly extended scholarly knowledge of the phenomenon, adding a layer of understanding, and theoretical

and historical contextualization, to the intense media coverage that attends the bigger literary awards every year.

The media scrutiny English refers to was not always present, however, and in the British context developed slowly over the course of the twentieth century, along with the number of prizes in existence. There are specific examples of the role identified by English of earlier royal and national academies in establishing a literary prize culture: the Poet Laureateship, which can be traced to the seventeenth century; and the Gold Medals offered (not uncontentiously) for some years after 1823 by the Royal Society of Literature (*Economy of Prestige*, 41–48). Moving into the twentieth century, the James Tait Black Memorial Awards were established in 1919, in memory of a publisher at A&C Black, and developed with a close association to the University of Edinburgh, where they are now housed and administered. The same year saw the foundation of the Hawthornden Prize, "a major literary prize before Booker" (Chester). The Saltire Society Book Award was first awarded in 1937, the year after the foundation of the Society itself, an entity which has the mission (in its own words) "to improve the quality of life in Scotland and restore the country to its proper place as a creative force in Europe." As such, it developed "a series of national awards" in the fields of architecture, arts and crafts, civil engineering, history, literature, music, and science (Saltire Society). Early awards were made to authors, including Robert Gore-Brown, Neil Gunn, and Edwin Muir, but not with any degree of regularity until 1982, well after the foundation of the Booker Prize. The history of the latter is well documented, but given its importance not just to British literary prize culture but the literary marketplace worldwide, it is worth reexamining its beginnings, development and current structure before examining contemporary literary prize culture.

The Booker Prize

The Booker Prize was established in 1968, and first awarded the following year, although its origins can be traced to a meeting of the Society of Young Publishers (SYP) in 1964 (Norris, "Recontextualising the Booker"). Two organizations came together at the foundation of the prize: the Publishers Association (PA), the trade organization for publishers in Britain, and the company Booker McConnell. Tom Maschler, who was also Publishing Director at Jonathan Cape, was the prime mover at the PA, and one of the speakers at the 1964 SYP meeting. Booker's core business was in rum marketing, food distribution, engineering and shipping, and as such might seem to have little to do with the business of books and publishing. The company, however, also had an Authors Division, which, to take advantage of a tax loophole, had invested in the copyright of authors such as Ian Fleming and Agatha Christie. Booker McConnell decided to diversify this literary interest into sponsoring a major literary prize. It would seem that the two quite different organizations were thinking at the same time of such a development, and eventually brought their mutual interests together (Caine).

In one of the Booker Prize's celebratory anniversary volumes, *Booker 30*, Maschler describes the spark of memory that led him into communication with Booker McConnell and to the foundation of the Booker Prize. As a young man in 1951, Maschler had spent time in Paris during the autumn, the literary prize season:

> I well remember sharing in the excitement which surrounded the literary prizes throughout that season. The Prix Goncourt above all, but also the smaller ones. Virtually every evening the subject would come up. Before the prizes were announced, the merits or demerits of the winner were analysed. Within a brief period of the announcement, half the people I met seemed to have read the Goncourt winner. Such intellectual fervour left a lasting impression on me. (Maschler 15)

Under the aegis of the PA, Maschler approached Booker McConnell to discuss their funding of what he termed "a major literary award – something at least as significant as the National Book Award in the US, and hopefully, something that is going to have some of the impact of the Goncourt." After some negotiation, Booker agreed to fund the prizewinner to the substantial tune of £5,000 a year, in addition to other expenses relating to the prize, such as judges' fees and expenses, and promotional costs.

After several months of meetings, discussion and correspondence, the two organizations were ready to make a public announcement at a press conference on October 3, 1968, although there had already been some discussion of the forthcoming prize in both the general media and the trade press. The press release that accompanied the announcement makes clear the impetus behind the prize. It began with a quotation from the *Sunday Times* literary diarist "Atticus" earlier in the year, who commented that "Britain comes pretty low in the World Literary Award Stakes," and then went on to survey the quiet British literary award scene:

> There are already almost fifty literary prizes and awards available in this country, ranging from inscribed quills to sums of £1,000, for almost every conceivable type of literary work and category of author. One particularly charming one, for a lyric poem, brings its lucky winner "a bronze medal together with a sum of money (about £4 8s 6d less the cost of the medal)." This is almost exactly the equivalent, financially, of the French Prix Goncourt, but it doesn't take a very astute observer of the British press to note that the latter probably gets more space in British papers than all the British prizes put together. (Publishers Association, Oct. 4, 1968)

The press release then detailed the planned submission and administration processes of this "really significant literary prize," most notably its introduction of a shortlist, which "will be released four to six weeks before the final decision is made so that the sort of speculation so beloved in France will be possible in Britain for the first time, thus stimulating interest in more than one book and one author." The attraction of Goncourt's precedent was not so much about the mechanism of the shortlist and organization of the prize itself, but referred to the organizers' hopes that the new prize

would generate a "sort of speculation" and hence press coverage that would accrue to the prize over a period of time.

The press release went on to comment, in the context of writers in the media for the *wrong* reasons (given the period, an implicit reference perhaps to the persecuted writers of the Soviet bloc as well as to some of the more provocative writers of the UK and US):

> Although the sum of £5,000 will be a generous reward to the winning author, we hope that his real success will be a significant interest in the sales of his book and that this will to some extent be shared by not only the authors who have been short-listed, but, in the long run, by authors all over the country. A substantial literary prize should mean that a writer does not need to be censored, imprisoned, or labelled outrageous and controversial before hitting the headlines and will, we hope, help to narrow the all too frequent gap between artistic and commercial success. (Publishers Association, Oct. 4, 1968)

On the one hand this extract from the press release demonstrates the keenness of the PA to focus proper attention on writing and the writer through its newly announced prize. However, it is also evident from the aspirational statement that the PA's motivations were not solely about literary prestige. The double desire for "artistic and commercial success" is clearly signaled; an intention to increase book sales was central to the prize's mission from its inception. This should come as no surprise: the Booker Prize, after all, was set up by an industry organization which would have the concerns of business as well as literature at its heart. In Bourdieusian terms, the organizers were intentionally attempting a fusion of cultural and economic capital.

Despite early struggles to achieve both artistic and commercial success, which have been catalogued by Todd, English, Norris, and others, the Booker Prize would develop into one of the most high-profile literary prizes in the world, with great international impact and latterly with brand extensions: the Man International Booker Prize (awarded from 2005 for a writer's lifetime work rather than a single novel, and with translated and US authors eligible as well as novelists from the UK and Commonwealth), and other prizes celebrating successive anniversaries (including the Booker of Bookers in 1993 and the Best of the Booker in 2008). As English and other commentators have identified, much of the early identity of the prize was fostered via the publicity generated by a series of scandals. Indeed, there is much anecdote and some evidence to suggest that the series of scandals were, at least to some degree, created by Booker in order to attract media attention or, in English's formulation, "journalistic capital."

An early example of Booker's utilization of "scandal" is Malcolm Muggeridge's resignation as the chair of the judging panel in 1971. The resignation became a public event, well known both in the history of the Booker Prize and recent British literary culture. Some way through the judging process, Muggeridge sent a letter to the organizing committee to say that he would have to resign because the vast majority

of the books that he'd been sent for reading were "mere pornography" and had no redeeming features whatsoever. The Booker Committee tried to hush up the resignation as much as they could, but they were obliged to announce that he was resigning. The press release stated, however, that the resignation was due to his "general lack of sympathy" with the titles submitted in that year. This phrase was taken from his letter, but omitted any reference to pornography, thus giving a rather softer perspective to his dismissive analysis of the books he'd been reading (Publishers Association, July 30, 1971). The headlines of the newspapers are instructive: some simply used the press release copy to report the resignation, repeating the line that he stepped down "through general lack of sympathy." However, the proper story had been leaked, as other newspapers reported the more salacious story, including two big headlines in the tabloid *Sun*: "Muggeridge Quits in 'Porn' Row"; "St Mugg Quits in Porn Storm" (Roberts). This first public scandal of the Booker thus extended well beyond the literary pages, beyond the literary critics, beyond the broadsheets, and beyond the literary establishment. English states that it was Martyn Goff, the new chief administrator of the prize, who had passed on the details to the newspapers, and that this "impresario" of the Booker Prize had a very canny understanding of media-worthiness which he would go on to cultivate in successive years to be the making of the Booker (English, *Economy of Prestige*, 207–208). This cultivation of the media has developed to the point where every year there is now an expectation of some sort of quarrel, or at the very least, lively debate, surrounding the prize, thus animating what might otherwise be seen as a recondite process.

Contemporary Literary Prize Culture

After its establishment in the late 1960s, the Booker Prize set the tone for contemporary British literary prize culture in its orientation toward the market and the media. It also laid down ways of formulating book awards, both to maximize journalistic capital, but also to establish eligibility criteria and judging processes, as the initial press release detailed. A high-profile gala awards announcement and dinner were part of the Booker Prize from its earliest days. The Queen was invited (but declined) to present the inaugural award, which was eventually made by the Labour Arts Minister at the time, Jennie Lee.

Literary awards bring to the world of writing a very overt sense of competition, with their shortlists, speeches, and eventual winners. For authors, they represent, as the opening section of this chapter discussed, the opportunity to gain prestige and recognition as well as the prizewinner's purse and elevated sales. Given the typically low financial return for which many authors labor, with (according to a 2007 survey) 33 percent earning below the national average wage, literary awards extend the possibility of earning more, or indeed even of becoming one of the top 10 percent of authors who earn 50 percent of the total income of surveyed authors (ALCS). As such, the financial aid that literary prizes can potentially offer could be viewed

alongside the support proffered by public subsidy, fellowships, residencies and creative writing posts at universities, although, perhaps, with an even greater degree of competition and lack of predictability. Evidence for the sales uplift offered by a big prize like the Booker demonstrates how a book can achieve a much larger audience after winning, and its author a greater standing, as the careers of Pat Barker and Hilary Mantel have demonstrated (Stoddard 2012; Squires, "Book Marketing"). In some cases, the public choices some winning authors have made of how to spend their prize money have resulted in uneasy exchange values: P.H. Newby, the first winner of the Booker, said he might use his money for a new study; whereas A.S. Byatt spent her money from the 1990 winner, *Possession*, on a swimming pool in the south of France; and Peter Carey's proceeds from the 2001 winner, *The True History of the Kelly Gang*, were to go toward New York private school fees for his sons (Byatt; "Judges and Public"). Such high-profile utterances might suggest that the latter two writers have an elevated lifestyle, close to if not in the top 10 percent of literary earners.

The equation between economic and cultural value is most evident in the National Book Awards (previously the British Book Awards). These awards are a self-styled equivalent of the Oscars for film: an industry-focused set of awards chosen by an "Academy" of industry insiders. The winners are frequently books that have obviously benefited the industry – sometimes by already being bestsellers, and sometimes in terms of raising industry profile. As such, these awards draw attention to concentration in the field of literary awards and the literary marketplace more generally, and to what English has identified as a "Winner Take All" approach, in which an "apparent democratic dispersal of symbolic cultural wealth" via a proliferation of prizes has, instead, seemingly produced an "even more pronounced tendency for huge numbers of prizes to accrue to a handful of big winners" (*Economy of Prestige*, 334). Hilary Mantel is one example, winning with her novel *Wolf Hall* (2009) the Man Booker, the National Book Critics Circle Award, the inaugural Walter Scott Prize for historical fiction, and a shortlisting for the Orange Prize. No surprise, then, that she was named as UK Author of the Year in the British/National Book Awards. She would go on to win the Man Booker again in 2012 for *Bring Up the Bodies*, a sequel to *Wolf Hall* – a very evident concentration of awards on one writer.

Prizes, then, induce real competition between writers, an aspect which does not go without criticism from literary purists and those for whom art should not be turned into a battlefield. An aspect of prizes sometimes less examined, however, is the tendency – particularly as they have proliferated after the establishment of the Booker Prize at the end of the 1960s – for prizes to become competitive between themselves, and to fight for media coverage, sponsorship deals, the highest prize purse, a distinctive niche, or a stronger reputation for literary quality. A key example of this from the mid-1990s is the establishment of the Orange Prize for Fiction, which set itself up directly in opposition to the other major UK-based literary prizes which – Orange's founders argued – consistently overlooked high quality writing from women. (The initial announcement of the Booker Prize in its 1968 press release made an assump-

tion of "his . . . success.") The prize, therefore, is only awarded to female writers and is judged by all-female juries. Unlike both the Booker and the other highest profile UK awards, the Whitbread (subsequently Costa) Awards, the Orange Prize also takes into consideration US writers (Booker's eligibility criterion is that writers must be from the UK, the Commonwealth, Ireland, or Zimbabwe; Costa's is that writers must be resident in the UK or Ireland, though not necessarily of UK or Irish citizenship). The Orange Prize's founders had an ideological approach in their determination to address a gender imbalance in the field of literary prizes, which they concretized via their judging processes and eligibility criteria. By offering a higher prize purse than Booker in their initial years (£30,000 compared to £20,000), Orange signaled not only its desire to give an award to quality from a gendered perspective, but also to reward it, substantially. When the Booker Prize sought a new sponsor for the award in 2002, part of the agreed deal with the Man Group was a bigger purse for the winning author. The £50,000 award reasserted in financial terms, then, the subtly renamed Man Booker's primacy.

At the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries, the literary prize environment in Britain, then, is populated by high-profile prizes which have the power to make key interventions in the shape of an author's future income and career. In addition to these prizes, however, there is a broad range of other awards operating within the environment, some of which function in rather different ways or to different ends. As mentioned earlier, the most immediately apparent way in which literary prizes operate is toward the end of the publication cycle, where it has an impact on reception. Yet, given the literary and financial currency that a big award can confer on a writer, the next novel from a Booker Prize winner, for example, will affect the whole of the publishing value chain, including the initial decision to publish. Although they might not normally be thought of within the same category, awards, bursaries and fellowships made to writers (whether by publicly funded organizations such as Arts Council England and Creative Scotland, or by private organizations such as the Hawthornden Castle Fellowships) in order to research or complete their books constitute part of a competitive scene, but one which is specifically oriented toward the creation of books, rather than being post-publication. Literary prizes and awards also range over a variety of genres (such as the Crime Writers' Association Dagger Awards and the Romantic Novelists' Awards), frequently with the aim of showcasing the genre as well as rewarding its best writers. The Independent Foreign Fiction Award chooses the best translated work of contemporary fiction each year, while also promoting the art of translation and the wealth of writing not originally produced in English. Given the low figures for translation into the English language (frequently put at about 3 percent of total title output, but rarely actually quantified), such an initiative has a relevance beyond that of celebrating a single book or shortlist (Hahn). Elsewhere, prestigious literary publications such the *Iowa Review* hold an annual contest, the winners of which win both money and publication in the December issue of the magazine. The $20 fee per entry contributes, it can be assumed, to the magazine's overall profitability.

The literary prize environment is one that continues to provoke debate. At the heart of any literary award are issues of literary value, taste and judgment, of representation and gatekeeping, and the uneasy equations of artistic and commercial value. As the feminist approach of the Orange Prize demonstrates, part of this debate surrounds the constitution of the judging panels. Indeed, since the foundation of the Orange Prize, a statistical survey of the gender balance of the Booker Prize's judges and shortlisted authors demonstrates a shift to an equal involvement of women judges and (possibly not unconnected) a greater number of female writers as winners and on shortlists, although the figure for the winners and shortlisted writers is still far from 50 percent. There have also been arguments about the lack of representation of Scottish writers, with only one Scottish winner in 1994, James Kelman's *How Late It Was, How Late*, whose award proved controversial: even a "disgrace," according to one of the judges ("Fiction at its Finest," 18). These arguments are connected to the accusation that Booker judges – whatever their gender – tend to be middle class and from the south of England (Norris, "Scots and the Booker"; Bissett). The argument is a difficult one, because (as Norris and Bissett acknowledge), Booker has been generous at recognizing the talents of postcolonial writers. Two conclusions can be drawn from this: first, that Booker judges are directed more by class than nationality, or alternatively influenced by, in Huggan's formulation, "the postcolonial exotic"; and second, that any attempt to conflate national identity with literary production can become fraught with complication. Certainly, the Commonwealth Writers prizes have a much more dispersed judging process not centered on London, featuring distinctly fewer white judges, and a comparative study of these two sets of awards would be very productive.

The approach of a particular award can be assessed through its choices of judges and the judging process. Numerous children's book awards, for example, incorporate an aspect of the target audience into their decision-making process. Until its demise in 2010, the Booktrust Teenage Prize had a panel of teenage judges reading the shortlist chosen by adults, having themselves won a short story competition to be on the panel. The Blue Peter Book Awards include an aspect of an online public vote from a shortlist. I have discussed this elsewhere:

> [this] turn away from traditional gatekeepers can be interpreted in a number of different ways: as indicative of a more market-focused approach to prizes; as an attempt to engage children directly in literary prizes rather than via a series of intermediaries; as a belief that children may value different books from traditional gatekeepers; as a loss of faith in traditional gatekeeping and literary valuation systems; or as a desire to be seen as relevant in a changing world, in which cultural decisions are frequently turned over to popular vote. (Squires, "Marketing at the Millennium")

Adult prizes are not immune to the popular vote: the Scottish Mortgage Investment Trust Book Awards have a similar public participation aspect, with four category

winners chosen by the judges and then voted for online by the public. The justification for the public involvement is explained thus: "Our aim is to encourage people to read, discuss and get involved with the finalists. By including a public vote, we hope that people will feel more empowered to read, and will connect with the authors and want them to succeed" (Scottish Book Awards). The readers' "empowerment" is combined equally with the judges' vote, in a structure not dissimilar to that of prime time TV talent shows such as *Strictly Come Dancing*. As the public can vote without having read all (or indeed any) of the four shortlisted books, it is arguable – however well intentioned – that such a construction of empowerment, access and democracy mediated by digital technologies risks relinquishing any sense of carefully considered literary value. Such twenty-first century innovations to prize processes should make any commentator on the literary prize scene question whether literary prizes can ever actually decide which is the "best" book – indeed, whether any mechanism or process can do that. The ongoing debate leaves unresolved the questions satirically posed by Posy Simmonds's cartoon, but also demonstrates how the book award is likely to be an enduring feature of the literary marketplace. Writers wait on, nervously, for the verdict.

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Part III
Creative Writing in the World

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D.H. Lawrence, Forever on the Move: Creative Writers and Place

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Even at the end of his life, when D.H. Lawrence was seriously ill with tuberculosis, so ill and invalided that he spent most of his time in bed, he was one of the most peripatetic writers who ever lived. During 1927 (when Lawrence experienced the first of a series of serious hemorrhages), through 1930 (the year of his death), Lawrence and his wife Frieda lived in a series of inns, hotels, borrowed houses, and rented villas; they also visited friends and family for extended periods. All this time, though much weakened, though moving from place to place, Lawrence composed *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, one of his masterworks.

In these last years, with little energy to spare from the difficult work of simply staying alive and writing – the Lawrences needed his income from writing and were often nearly destitute – Lawrence and Frieda lived in the Villa Mirenda at San Polo Mosciano, southwest of Florence; with friends in Forte dei Marmi; with Frieda's sister Johanna at Villach in Austria to see if it helped Lawrence breathe more easily (it did, for a time). They moved into a borrowed house in Irschenhausen in Bavaria; moved back to the Villa Mirenda; considered moving back to Eastwood, in the Midlands, where Lawrence lived as a child, but didn't; joined their friends the Huxleys at Les Diablerets in Switzerland; considered moving back to their ranch in Questa, New Mexico but didn't (it was a gift to Frieda from Mabel Dodge Luhan); moved to the Grand Hotel in Chexbres-sur-Vevey, on the north side of Lake Geneva in Switzerland, to escape the summer's heat in Italy; lived in a rented chalet, the Chalet Kesselmatte in Gsteig in Switzerland, for a summer; visited Frieda's mother in Baden-Baden where the Lawrences decided to give up the Villa Mirenda; moved to Le Lavandou near Toulon; lived with friends for the winter in La Vigie in the island of Port Cros, but

Lawrence became increasingly ill there, so they decided to move on; journeyed by boat to Toulon, and then along the coast for a few weeks; settled in the Hotel Beau-Rivage in Bandol where Lawrence felt at home for the first time in a long while; journeyed to Paris to see to the private publication of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*; moved to Majorca; returned to visit the Huxleys in Forte dei Marmi; lived in his publisher's flat in Florence; moved into the Hotel Lowen in Baden-Baden; visited Kurhaus Platig in the Black Forest, where his condition worsened; moved to Rottach-am-Tegernsee in the Bavarian Alps, where Lawrence came to believe the altitude was wrong for him – here, they had virtually no furnishings, but they had a potted gentian bush, about which Lawrence wrote the poem "Bavarian Gentians"; moved to the Beau-Rivage in Bandol, where Lawrence believed he was able to breathe more easily; moved into the bungalow Villa Beau Soleil in Bandol, right on the sea, with wonderful air and light; moved into the sanatorium Ad Astra in the mountains of Vence (for this move, Lawrence packed his own trunk, and tidied the villa for Frieda before moving); moved into the Villa Robermond in Vence because he believed the sanatorium wasn't doing him any good and because he didn't want to die there; dreamed of returning to his ranch in New Mexico, but couldn't, because now he was near death; died in the Villa Robermond in Vence.

All told, Lawrence moved over a hundred times during his lifetime – he was only in his mid-forties when he died, and didn't begin to move often until he was in his late twenties – averaging five to six moves a year, when others as sick as he was would have stayed put. While some might claim that a settled life is necessary for a writer to be prolific, that moving from one place to another disturbs the rhythm of a writer's work habits, Lawrence's example proves that this truism doesn't hold for every writer.

Lawrence remarked several times that he moved so often because he was searching for a place where he could breathe freely – both literally and metaphorically: in Austria, he felt he needed to leave because, he said, "I feel I can't breathe" (*Letters*, iv.63–64). He thought that the mountain air would be good for him, and so moved to New Mexico; he thought that he might breathe better in the south, and so moved to Mexico.

Having lived, in childhood, in the mining town of Eastwood in the Midlands, having suffered, from childhood, from a respiratory illness caused by the effects of breathing soot-filled air, he wanted, more than anything, to live in a place free from the harmful effects of industry. He preferred unspoiled places away from people who might interfere with his work. He needed to live where he felt free from people's demands and so, when he felt people were trying to control him – as when Mabel Dodge Luhan wanted him to revitalize her – he resisted, packed up, and moved on. And though he never found a domestic Eden – for wherever he moved soon displeased him – that very restlessness, that search, that seeking and not finding, seemed essential for his work.

Lawrence knew he needed to move to spark his creativity. Though Frieda didn't want to leave Kiowa Ranch in Questa, New Mexico, in 1925, Lawrence's decision to

move back to Europe prevailed (*Letters*, v.28). Lawrence knew that a settled life would not work for him. He needed to feel that he could move at any time. Paradoxically, he continually searched for the perfect place to live, suspecting he wouldn't find it. This tug of war – wanting to find a domestic Eden, needing to move on – seemed necessary for his work. He did not question his impulses and moved when he thought another place might suit him better. When it didn't, he moved again.

He knew he needed to leave England after *The Rainbow* was banned and after he and Frieda were forced to leave their cottage in Cornwall because they were accused of being spies; he knew that staying in England would kill him and would forestall his ability to write, and so he and Frieda moved to Europe. He knew he needed to leave Europe because the aftermath of the Great War profoundly affected him, and so he journeyed to Ceylon, Australia, and America: the "War finished me: it was the spear through the side of all sorrows and hopes" (*Letters*, ii.68). He knew when he needed to travel to rejuvenate his art and to find new subject matter. So he journeyed to Sardinia and wrote *Sea and Sardinia*; to Australia and wrote *Kangaroo*; to Etruscan sites and wrote *Etruscan Places*; to New Mexico, where he hoped to write a novel about Indians, and where he penned essays about them, poems about the landscape, and *The Woman Who Rode Away*, *St Mawr*, and *The Princess*; to Mexico, where he wrote *The Plumed Serpent*; to Italy, where he wrote *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, after he became very ill in America and realized that life on the ranch in New Mexico was too hard.

Write what you know well, that truism beginning writers are taught. And for the first several of his novels, D.H. Lawrence did write what he knew: from *The White Peacock* through *Women in Love*, Lawrence's novels were set in England and examined his current thinking about relationships between men and women based upon his own relationships. In *Aaron's Rod*, Lawrence used his journey from England to Italy, his adulterous relationship with Rosalind Baynes, and his belief about the corrupt state of Europe, as sources.

Early on, Lawrence believed he could become an insider to high British culture because of his achievements. But he learned that although people like Lady Ottoline Morrell and Bertrand Russell might lionize him, they treated him more as a curious specimen – the son of a miner who'd become a famous writer – than an equal. Lawrence was an outsider, as John Worthen has observed in *D.H. Lawrence: The Life of an Outsider*. He did not belong in his parents' mining community; he never gained entry into the center of British intellectual and artistic life. No matter how brilliant he was, no matter how groundbreaking his work, he could never be completely accepted: "I do not belong . . . at all, at all" (*Letters*, ii.33).

This enraged him, yet Lawrence understood that his outsider position was necessary for his art, and he cultivated it, forcing a distance between himself and others, writing long haranguing letters criticizing his friends for their behavior, and exposing their peccadilloes in his work. From the margins, he could launch ferocious attacks against whatever or whomever he observed, for he wanted people to change their ways to reflect his ideals. When he lived in England, he savaged Ottoline Morrell in

Women in Love, and he couldn't understand why the people he criticized in his work objected, and even initiated lawsuits against him (DeSalvo 197). When he lived in the United States, he saw that the country's history was steeped in blood, and he expressed this in virtually everything he wrote while there: "the unappeased ghosts of the dead Indians" haunted American souls, he wrote in *Studies in Classic American Literature* (44). When he lived on Lake Chapala in Mexico, he described the destructive hold religion had on the Mexican people in *The Plumed Serpent*. His work, he believed, would help people change their ways and find a better way to live.

He understood that familiarity often stunted his creativity. His senses were sharper, his observations keener, in a new place. He was a quick study, uncovering what he believed to be the essence of a place and its people soon after arriving. Days after moving to Taos, he wrote about an Indian ceremony; as soon as he was in Sardinia, he began writing about it. He began *Studies in Classic American Literature*, his critique of a way of life revealed through a country's literature, before he moved to America, recasting his views after living there; he called the American Dream the American Demon.

Yet there was an arrogance in his assumption that he could so quickly understand an alien culture: he believed he could penetrate the Indian psyche, but what he wrote – his essay on the snake dance, for example – could not be anything more than a superficial account and more often was a projection of what he believed about Indian behavior based upon the scantiest of evidence: Indians, he wrote, possessed "no inside life" (*Letters*, iv.362). But he believed whatever he wrote was the truth – not his truth, but *the* truth.

Why did Lawrence move so often? Why was he so unsatisfied?

D.H. Lawrence's parents moved often. His mother Lydia was initially attracted to Arthur, her charismatic, virile, miner husband. But after marriage, she wanted a better life for herself and her children. She fancied herself better than him: she'd been a teacher, read philosophy, wrote poetry. His filthy presence at the table, crude manners, and drinking disgusted her. She did not want their son David Herbert to work in the pit, and she turned him against his father.

During Lawrence's childhood, his mother was scornful of where she lived, of people's habits, thought herself better than them, and chronicled her grievances against her living situation and her husband to her son. She hated her house in the Breach, the community built for miners. She hated the view of ash pits from the back of her house. She hated the noise, the smoke, the clanking headstock. She believed she deserved a better life.

When Lawrence was six, the family moved again, to another house in the Breach with a wonderful view. They soon moved again. Each time, Lydia hoped the new place would be more suitable. But she soon became dissatisfied and wanted to move on, teaching Lawrence a pattern he himself would enact in adulthood. Lydia told him he could only realize her dreams for him by leaving Eastwood. Lawrence learned from

her that the meaning of home was dissatisfaction and disaffection: home was not a place to stay, it was a place to leave; home was not a place to be satisfied, it was a place to be discontented. Still, though he left, though he criticized the Midlands, he idealized it, too, referring to it as the country of his heart.

Lydia always wanted something special to distinguish her home from those of her neighbors. A nicer view. A bigger front window. A corner lot. A garden. She hoped a "proper" home would change her life: satisfaction depended upon a change in surroundings, not a change in the self, a belief Lawrence learned. She instilled in him a chronic yearning for an unattainable ideal, propelling Lawrence from one place to another, sometimes after a few months, sometimes after a few weeks, but sometimes, too, after a few days. Each time he moved, Lawrence hoped the next place would match his ideals, but it rarely did. At times Lawrence understood the source of his dissatisfaction, remarking that people with a childhood like his were condemned to look for, but never find, an ideal home.

During Lawrence's boyhood, his parents fought constantly. Though he hated the household's violence, Lawrence's household with Frieda repeated that familial pattern. Knud Merrild, who lived on the Del Monte Ranch in New Mexico with the Lawrences, recorded the couple's battles and Lawrence's brutality toward his dog (167); Mabel Dodge Luhan described the "great black and blue bruises" she saw on Frieda's body when she undressed (*Lorenzo*, 94); but Frieda fought back and mocked and derided Lawrence and once smashed him over the head with a frying pan. No change of scene made the couple more tranquil.

Near Lawrence's childhood home was a brook, hedgerows, and open land into which he escaped often. He developed a passion for nature and learned it eased his dissatisfaction. Lawrence's love of the countryside was engendered, too, by his visits to Jessie Chambers and her family at the Haggs, the family farm: it was one of the few places Lawrence felt at home. Throughout his life, Lawrence paid close attention to the natural world, and wrote site-specific poems, sometimes using what he saw, as in "Almond Blossom" (written in Italy) and "The Evening Land" and "The American Eagle" (written in New Mexico) as a vehicle for social criticism, for discussing the corrosive effects of culture. He liked to work outside and alone, sitting under a tree in the Tyrol; sitting with his back to a rock overlooking the sea in Cornwall; sitting in the shade in the desert in Mexico; sitting with a view of the Rocky Mountains before him in New Mexico.

Though Lydia Lawrence instilled a restless spirit in Lawrence, she also taught him high standards for a home's location and appearance. He learned to beautify wherever he lived, no matter how humble his circumstances, no matter how little time he would spend there.

After Lawrence's marriage to Frieda in 1912, the couple moved constantly in search of the ideal place to live. He liked moving to new places, liked looking forward to what he would find, though he would soon be disappointed. Wherever he lived had to be beautifully situated in a country setting, unmarred by any evidence of industry,

preferably high on a hill. It should have a grand view, preferably of water. Near the sea, Lawrence became calm and felt more in touch with a world unpolluted by industry and the presence of human beings; he loved the sea's constant motion, loved bathing in it, respected its strength, power, and unpredictability. It should be where people lived authentically: Lawrence visited Sardinia in 1921 because he thought an undefeated maleness still existed there; he journeyed to Etruscan sites because he believed in the authenticity of their culture. Wherever he lived should have air he could easily breathe: he thought if he could find that place it would cure him of his ills. It should be in a remote location so he and Frieda wouldn't be bombarded with guests (though, when isolated, they fought), and so he could write without interruption; but it should be near a community of like-minded people with whom Lawrence could socialize, but only when he wanted.

He sometimes hoped that he could find a place to establish Ranamin, a utopian community. He asked his friends to join him in building this community throughout his life but his dream never materialized. The Lawrences' attempt at communal living with Katherine Mansfield and John Middleton Murry in Cornwall failed miserably.

Lawrence often found places he believed suited his needs, though where they resided might be borrowed, and modest or even derelict. A house on Lake Garda in Italy. A cottage in Fiascherino on the Bay of Spezia. A cottage near Chesham in Buckinghamshire. A rustic abode in Porthcothan in Cornwall. A place in Picinisco in the wilds of Abruzzi. A villa in Taormina in Sicily. A bungalow in New South Wales, Australia. Kiowa Ranch outside of Taos, New Mexico (the home he most longed to return to as he was dying). A house on Lake Chapala, Mexico. But during his life, Lawrence felt truly at home in only four places – Zennor, on the coast of Cornwall; Fontana Vecchia in Taormina, Sicily; the Villa Mirenda, overlooking the Val d'Arno in Tuscany; and Kiowa Ranch in Questa, New Mexico.

Even in temporary quarters, Lawrence worked hard to transform it into his own home. He scrubbed grime off brick floors, put up shelves, made a dresser or a cabinet, colored the walls (in Zennor, they were pale pink), decorated pots and jars, borrowed furnishings or bought them at flea markets, sewed curtains, adorned the place with flowers. If he lived in a place long enough, he gardened, planting vegetables and flowers; in Zennor, he made three gardens, one providing vegetables for their table.

Lawrence was a househusband, who cooked, baked, cleaned (scrubbing pots until they gleamed), and decorated (austerely, but with beautiful objects arranged aesthetically). He ran the household, made travel plans, arranged moves. All this, while he was earning money to support them with his writing, often writing well over 2,000 words a day, often near destitution – when the Lawrences came to the United States, Lawrence had less than $20 (*Letters*, iv.288). Frieda believed her mission was to be a *Magner Mater*, the strength behind Lawrence's genius; she often reclined, a cigarette dangling from her mouth (which Lawrence hated), commenting (often derisively) on Lawrence's pronouncements. Having grown up with servants, though she loved to wash clothes and cooked occasionally, she did relatively little housework. At Kiowa

Ranch, Lawrence tended the horses, milked the cow, baked the bread, rode horseback to get butter.

Lawrence became furious if the place he had moved to didn't turn out to be the way he'd imagined, though he continually sought a place that could fulfill his "nostalgia for something I know not what," as he wrote in *Sea and Sardinia* (73). He would hear about a place he believed might be suitable, imagine what it would be like, assume it would be better than where he was living, decide to relocate, break up house, and move on. Sometimes – as when the Lawrences moved to Australia from Ceylon – they would move great distances on a whim: someone Lawrence met described Australia to him and it sounded fascinating.

Once there, Lawrence would determine whether it met his expectations. Sometimes it suited him and he stayed for a time. But, as when he traveled to Sardinia, as soon as he found something wrong (heat, cold, snow, dirt, the food, the people), or he wasn't treated well, or if the local inhabitants weren't living as he believed they should (and authenticity seemed to mean living a life unspoiled by modern civilization), or if he became ill while there (blaming the place, and not his illness, for a decline in health), he would become restless, or fly into a rage, and feel compelled to move on. And then the Lawrences would pack, leave, and move to the next idealized place and live there until it too stopped suiting him.

Lawrence believed a new place would mean a new life for him. When he moved to Germany to meet Frieda before they married, he said he wanted to escape from England, wanting a break from his past (*Letters*, ii.21). When he moved to Irschenhausen, he felt "cut off from my past life – like a re-incarnation." When he moved to Porthcothan in Cornwall, he said he would experience "a new life" (ii.489). When he and Frieda moved to Lake Garda, he said he went there to undertake the difficult project of changing himself. When he and Frieda moved to Ceylon, he was eager to see more of the world and wanted "a new *start*"; by then he was sick of Europe and he moved even though he thought Ceylon wouldn't suit him, that his stay would be impermanent and that, there, he would only "make more ends" (iv.213). When they moved to Australia, Lawrence remarked upon how, there, the "earth and air are new" (v.260).

Except when he was forced to move, Lawrence looked forward to relocating, to finding a place to live, to setting up house again. Once Frieda and he hatched a plan to move, he was optimistic, full of hope this new place would be the "Promised Land" and that he would feel freer and more at peace there. When he thought about the advantages of a new place, he idealized it and studied its history: when he dreamed of living in Erice in Sicily, he learned about the ancient Greek settlement there. He believed that living in such places would allow him "a most fascinating act of self-discovery – back, back down the old ways of time" (*Sea and Sardinia*, 133). But Lawrence understood, too, that any place would come to dissatisfy him and enrage him; it seemed fascinating when he imagined it, and its reality could never live up to his expectations; moving seemed "a splendid lesson in disillusion" (*Letters*, v.286).

Lawrence's first major move, from England to Europe, was precipitated by humiliation and persecution. When he first left, Lawrence felt it was a kind of death.

Lawrence believed *The Rainbow* was the finest expression of his art. In 1915, a reviewer, though, wrote that such a book had "no right to exist in the wind of war" (Worthen 164). The novel was declared obscene and offensive to society, and a directive was issued for all copies of the novel and the plates to be seized and destroyed. The censorship of this work affected Lawrence profoundly for he knew he could not write in a country where his work was condemned. "I curse them all to damnation" (*Letters*, ii.548), Lawrence wrote when he heard of the order. England became poisonous to him.

In autumn 1917, during the worst carnage of the Great War, because Frieda was German, and because a vicar who lived nearby hated them, the Lawrences were accused of being spies. They were living in a cottage in Zennor, Cornwall, a place Lawrence loved: "At last I am in my own home and feel content," he wrote; "I feel I have a place here" (*Letters*, ii.591).

The cottage was near a shipping lane. During their residence, more than 49 ships were sunk off Cornwall, three just off the coast of the Lawrences' cottage. The Lawrences were accused of signaling German submarines off the coast with flashlights. Their home was searched twice; some of Lawrence's papers were taken. Lawrence and Frieda were expelled from Cornwall by a military directive and told they could not live along the coast. When they moved to London, they were homeless, nearly penniless, and forced to beg friends for places to stay. With Lawrence unable to publish, they had no income. In London, they were placed under surveillance by Scotland Yard, which continued through 1919, when they left England. "I don't care where I go," he wrote, "so long as I can turn my back on it for good" (*Letters*, iii.318).

Lawrence believed that he lived in the equivalent of a police state; he had become its victim and the only way he could survive was to leave. After leaving England, he called himself an exile, comparing himself to "Ovid in Thrace" (Worthen 198). He also said he was an outsider, a pirate, a highwayman, an outlaw, a fox in a den. But upon arriving in the United States for the first time, Lawrence thought that he was no wayfarer, that he was, in fact, homeless, and had been for some time.

The Lawrences' mistreatment changed how Lawrence regarded the nature of home for the rest of his life. He began to say he liked not having a home, that he enjoyed a nomadic existence. Having a permanent abode would make him feel trapped. Frieda Lawrence, though, believed these remarks were inauthentic, a result of their being forced into an unwanted exile which changed Lawrence utterly: his wonder and joy at the world vanished; he became bitter, suspicious, and mistrustful (F. Lawrence 150).

Lawrence believed eradicating property ownership was necessary for the world to become a better place. He connected the "love of property and love of power" (*Letters*, ii.297). Possessions "sticking on me like barnacles" (ii.318) made him feel destructive. Often, the Lawrences would leave behind their household goods, set out with a knapsack, his kitchenino – a contraption rigged to make tea and light meals on the road

– and head to someplace else, furnishing their new household with items from jumble shops, furnishings he made himself, objects begged from friends. There were times Lawrence realized his restlessness was a symptom of inner disquiet: "what ails me I don't know, but it's on and on"; Frieda, though, always "craved a home and solidity" (Worthen 209) and their arguments often resembled those of Lawrence's parents about living arrangements.

No matter how difficult the circumstances, wherever Lawrence was – the home of a friend, an inn, a hotel, a steamer, a rented villa – he set up house and began to write. Feeling unsettled seemed to kindle his imagination. After Frieda and he were forced to leave Cornwall, while living in his sister's house in the Midlands, Lawrence drafted his essays on American literature. On a steamer to Ceylon, he translated Giovanni Verga's *Mastro-don Gesualdo*. In a rented bungalow in Thirroul in New South Wales, Australia, he began *Kangaroo*, writing 3,000 words a day for six weeks.

Lawrence's art was intensely autobiographical. He manifested an extraordinary capacity to render the places he lived and the people he met in exquisite detail, sometimes lyrically, but often critically and satirically. He was a keen observer, alert to the gestures in human behavior signifying character. He replicated conversations he'd had with people he knew in stunning detail, and he also precisely rendered his own diatribes against people and places. Frieda Lawrence said his art wasn't based upon reality, but upon "his deep underneath impressions" (163).

Lawrence deliberately moved from one place to another to gather material. His powers of observation became keener in a new place. Once his vision became blunted by habit and routine, he moved on. For much of his life, Lawrence's inspiration was tied to novelty and change.

After Lawrence used where he lived as a setting for his work, transformed the people he met into characters, plucked a life situation to examine, conceptualized a creative work and wrote it, he was finished and had to move for his next work to germinate. Sometimes he worked on a project in situ – as when he began *Kangaroo* in Australia. But often he wrote about a place when he no longer lived there – as when he wrote *Sons and Lovers*. After moving, his settings took on a mythic quality, becoming remembered places. That sense of one's continuing connection to a lost place through its recreation in memory is often an important component of his art.

Lawrence moved too because he alienated the people he wrote about. His work was intensely critical of people's behavior. He said his mission was to describe the faults and wrongful ways of people so they would improve themselves, never doubting he knew what was wrong and how they should change. He used the scalpel of words to lay bare each of his character's foibles, illusions, hypocrisies. What he did, he knew, was write "bombs" (*Letters*, ii.546). He used his experiences more as fodder for his art than as moments to be experienced for their own inherent value.

But the people he used as subjects were often harmed by his portrayals. Mabel Dodge Luhan wrote that Lawrence deliberately intended to harm her by portraying her as a self-destructive woman who sacrificed herself to Indian [his appellation] gods in *The Woman Who Rode Away*; a friend told Luhan that Lawrence admitted he intended

to finish her (Luhan, *Lorenzo*, 219); Lawrence's treatment profoundly affected her. Ottoline Morrell said that Lawrence's portrait of her as Hermione Roddice in *Women in Love* caused a prolonged depression (DeSalvo 205). Lawrence once wrote Amy Lowell that her character "Many Swans" in her retelling of an Indian sun myth spoke to his "unexplained soul" (*Letters*, iv.61–62): Many Swans becomes a lonely, solitary exile, incapable of controlling his rage, and he destroys every place, every person he encounters.

Lawrence believed human beings were not stagnant by nature but infinitely capable of change. The easiest way to change he believed was to move. He became committed to constant change, and one of the most powerful insults he could hurl at a person was that they were static. "The human being is a most curious creature," he wrote. "He thinks he has got one soul, and he has got dozens." Moving back to Taormina from Sardinia, Lawrence felt his "Sardinian soul melting off me, I felt myself evaporating into the real Italian uncertainty and momentaneity" (*Sea and Sardinia*, 190). The only way to metamorphose from one self into another was to move; the only way to experience all the possible selves one could be was to move often.

But Lawrence did not believe everyone should move. He believed someone like Paulo, whom he met in San Gaudenzio, should stay put; Paulo was an authentic soul and he was destroyed, not enriched, by change. Paulo had moved to America, then returned to Italy. To Lawrence, Paulo had "left his own reality," and in America "the very quick of him was killed" (Lawrence, *Twilight*, 87–89).

At the beginning of Lawrence's *Sea and Sardinia* (which is as much about moving as it is about Sardinia), Lawrence asks, "Why can't one sit still?" (10–11), meaning "Why can't I sit still?" He wondered why, even when he lived in Taormina where life was "so pleasant," he journeyed to Sardinia looking for a better place to live, for moving was inconvenient and drained the Lawrences' already meager resources. Lawrence's answer illuminates one of his motives for wanting to move.

Lawrence answers that he moved because he anticipated the pleasure it would bring. But, really, "it is the motion of freedom" he was after. If he lived in one place a long time, he felt fettered. Moving made him feel free, bound to no domicile, no set of people, no community, no country. Falling in love with a place, as Lawrence had in Zennor, was risky, for you might be forced to leave. Still, Sardinia soon began to dissatisfy him. The reality of Sardinia was nothing like his fantasy of it and he became enraged: it "had seemed so fascinating to me when I imagined it beforehand," he said. No place, though, could meet his idealized vision.

Through writing *Sea and Sardinia*, Lawrence learned that many of his moves were impelled by anger. Whenever he began to feel enraged, he moved on. The village of Sorgono in Sardinia, for example, seemed promising. Frieda and he liked the sound of its name, and believed "Sorgono . . . will be lovely" (96) and they might stay. Soon after arriving, Lawrence's mood became "black, black, black" (110) because an innkeeper didn't make a fire quickly and was vague about supper. Frieda chided Lawrence: a great fault of his was that he couldn't take life as it came because he

expected it to be other than it was. He conceded that he was furious because "Sorgono had seemed so fascinating" (110) but it wasn't and he decided they'd move to Nuoro.

Lawrence often ascribed his rage to outside circumstances. Sometimes, as when Frieda and he were expelled from Zennor, his fury was appropriate. Often, though, he became enraged because a place didn't meet his expectations. Lawrence blamed the place, not his own idealized portrait of it. Though Lawrence understood he moved when he became enraged, Lawrence didn't try to control his rage because of this insight. Instead, it dictated his behavior. Perhaps he knew that he should then move on because if he stayed put he might harm someone, his anger was that unpredictable, overwhelming, and uncontrollable. Perhaps leaving a place protected Lawrence from what he feared he might do.

But Lawrence didn't feel angry *while* traveling; his anger dissipated. On his sea voyage to Ceylon, he remarked, "no more of my tirades – the sea seems too big" (*Letters*, iv.208). Contemplating a new, ever changing seascape or landscape made Lawrence focus attention outside himself and soothed his troubled spirit. Upon settling down and setting up house, the demons of dissatisfaction, disillusionment, dis-ease, and rage would return. And soon, he and Frieda moved to another place, where the cycle would repeat itself.

It's risky for writers not to understand what they need in a home that will facilitate their work. The Lawrences' moves to Ceylon and New Mexico illustrate this.

The Lawrences looked forward to settling in Ceylon and set up house with very little furniture – "chairs and a table or two" (*Letters*, iv.215) – but with servants because their services were affordable. Lawrence soon began composing "The Elephant," a poem based upon a local ritual. Still, he soon felt he'd never write much because "one doesn't do much here" (iv.216) and he needed to work because he had promised his publisher a Ceylon novel.

Lawrence hadn't anticipated the enervating effects of the climate. The heat was oppressive; the smells made him nauseous; the food made him sick – he developed dysentery; "the horrid noises of the birds and creatures, who hammer and clang and rattle" (*Letters*, iv.225) outraged him. He'd expected Ceylon to be a new start. Though it was fascinating at first, Lawrence felt he "would die" if he had to stay (iv.227). His breathing was labored; the "choky feel of tropical forest" felt like a prison (iv.225). He needed to get to a place where he could breathe easily.

Lawrence regretted their move, believing he and Frieda had been hugely mistaken in leaving Europe. In this unfamiliar landscape, he felt untethered: "I . . . look round for myself among all this different world," he wrote (*Letters*, iv.216). The Lawrences left Ceylon after six weeks, and moved to Australia. "I like the feeling of rolling on," Lawrence said (iv.241). "I love trying things and discovering how I hate them" (iv.239).

After the Lawrences moved to Kiowa Ranch in New Mexico, Lawrence believed living in such a remote pristine place would benefit his health and his work. But he

underestimated the hard labor it would take to turn derelict cottages into livable habitations; he didn't anticipate the adverse effects of working hard at 8,600 feet above sea level and it nearly killed him: he had a serious crisis of tuberculosis at Kiowa and almost died.

Lawrence had to clear years' accumulation of filth; repair and replaster walls; build a chimney and an oven for baking bread and roasting meats; retile a roof; dig a ditch for water; feed and water horses, and all this labor took time from his writing: "I don't write when I slave," he said (*Letters*, v.45). Lawrence believed he needed to live far from people, but he hadn't realized how inconvenient it would be to travel to secure the commodities he needed. The road to the ranch was steep, treacherous, and impossible to traverse in bad weather. Lawrence had to ride horseback to Del Monte Ranch for milk and butter (until he bought his cow, Susan, and when she wandered off he'd have to find her and chase her back to the ranch) and to another place for eggs (until they got their own chickens). He had to ask Luhan to bring up stores of food (meat, vegetables). He had to travel to Taos for supplies – lumber, nails – he needed for building.

Though there was much about Kiowa Ranch Lawrence loved – the splendid setting, the intimate connection with nature – and although while there he wrote essays about New Mexico, the Indians, and the state of the novel, and wrote many of the poems in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers!* and also *St Mawr*, *The Woman Who Rode Away*, and *The Princess*, among other works, Lawrence never wrote the novel about Indians he'd planned. In the last months at Kiowa, he wrote the play *David*, but no fiction. He began to see the landscape as sinister, and the American way of life as morally bankrupt, its people "chained to the perch of prosperity" (Lawrence, *Birds*, 212).

That writer's dream of living far away from civilization ultimately proved deleterious to Lawrence and his health. After he moved back to Italy, and was living in the Villa Bernarda in Sportono, he realized how salubrious the climate was, and how much easier it was to live where he didn't have to work so hard (*Letters*, v.379). He began writing fiction again and started exploring the relationship between people and "the cosmos" in *The Escaped Cock*, *Sketches of Etruscan Places*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and *Apocalypse*, which describe how "the sun heals, regenerates, makes new" (Worthen 335).

Like many other writers, D.H. Lawrence transformed the places he lived into art. In his letters, he continually examined his lifelong history of moving – why he moved, how he thought a move would affect him, what he anticipated in moving, what he found when he relocated. In his work, he drew upon the places he lived and the people he met, but also upon his evolving insights about human relationships and how their environments affected his characters' lives. Lawrence knew that his need to move originated in his childhood, in his mother's discomfiture with where she lived. He knew he must live an exile's life. Lawrence knew that his would be a relentless, unrealizable, yet necessary quest for a domestic Eden.

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21

The Psychology of Creative Writing

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Approximately 3 billion books are sold each year in the United States, and more than a quarter of the population reports reading more than 15 books per year (Ipsos 1). The work of creative writers – including novelists, poets, playwrights, screenwriters, and sitcom writers – has a significant impact on our lives. Not surprisingly, creative writers elicit much curiosity from their audience. Freud had already noted that "We laymen have always been intensely curious to know . . . from what source that strange being, the creative writer, draws his material, and how he manages to make such an impression on us with it, and to arouse in us emotions of which, perhaps, we had not even thought ourselves capable" (Freud 36).

To further stimulate our curiosity, Freud noted that when asked, writers often give no explanation, or no good explanation, for their creative behavior – shrouding the creative writing process in an intriguing veil of mystery. The seemingly mysterious nature of creative writing may at least partially explain the relative lack of scientific attention this central human activity has garnered from psychologists. As noted by Sternberg, "creativity has been relatively little studied in psychology, creative writing even less so" (xv). Given the importance of writing in our daily lives, why haven't psychologists attempted to pierce the mystery and to understand the processes under-lying creative writing? Creative writing is a complex, multifaceted endeavor that can only be adequately apprehended using an interdisciplinary perspective. Researchers may have therefore been discouraged by the necessity of taking into account insights from other fields, and by the fact that creative writing may be harder to study (because
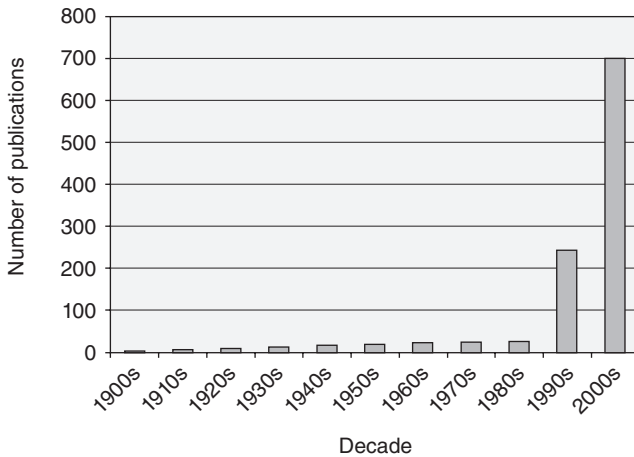
Figure 21.1 Cumulative number of publications on the subject of creative writing indexed in the PsycINFO database, by decade

it may be harder to produce on command), and harder to assess, than other psychological constructs (xv).

Fortunately, research interest in the science of creative writing has grown over recent years. A search of the PsycINFO database of the American Psychological Association for all publications on the topic of "creative writing" yields 702 publications from 1900 to 2010, with fewer than six publications per decade until the 1990s. Publications on the psychology of creative writing multiplied exponentially over the past two decades, with more than 200 in the 1990s, and more than 400 in the 2000s (see Figure 21.1). Psychologists' interest in creative writing is therefore rapidly growing. The purpose of this chapter is to review what has been discovered in this small but growing field of research, and to point to directions for future investigations. The content of this chapter draws in part from *The Psychology of Creative Writing* (S. Kaufman and Kaufman 2009), which brought together a unique collection of perspectives on this topic. The reader is referred to this volume for in-depth discussions of topics that can only be briefly described in this chapter.

To do so, we take a comprehensive approach to understanding creative writing, by considering the sequence of predictors and influences leading a creative writer to engage in a creative process resulting in a creative text. We begin by looking at the creative writer. In particular, we describe existing research on personality and mood. Secondly, we discuss the work of researchers who have attempted to delineate the various necessary steps involved in the creative writing process, and try to answer the question: how do writers move from a blank page to a final product? In doing so, we also review the tools and practices proposed by educators and psychologists to promote and enhance creative writing among students and aspiring writers.

The Creative Writer

Research investigating the characteristics of creative writers constitutes the bulk of scientific knowledge about the psychology of creative writing. In particular, investigations of the personality and mood of creative writers have yielded interesting insights into the determinants of creative writing.

Creative writers are often portrayed as unconventional and somewhat eccentric, a stereotype that has contributed to the fascination of laymen and researchers alike (Piirto 3). Can personality help us understand what distinguishes creative writers from noncreative types, or from creative individuals who work in other domains? Personality as defined by psychologists refers to traits that differ among individuals and present stability or consistency across time and situations (Feist 290).

First, research investigating the personality profiles of creative individuals across domains has evidenced consistent trends. For example, the most stable result across this body of literature is that creative individuals tend to be high in the personality trait of openness to experience as measured by the Five-Factor Model of personality (e.g. King et al. 199). This trait involves active imagination, and aesthetic and intellectual curiosity, as well as a preference for variety reflected by a willingness to try new things and experiences (190). What else do we know about the personalities of creative individuals? In a meta-analysis synthesizing results of numerous studies, Feist found that, overall, creative individuals tend to display more autonomy, introversion, openness to experience (as discussed above), questioning of social norms, self-confidence, self-acceptance, ambition, dominance, hostility, and impulsivity. Furthermore, longitudinal studies suggest that the personality of creative individuals tends to remain stable over time, and that personality traits assessed early in life can predict future creative behavior (299). When examining the personality only of artists (in comparison to non-artists also involved in creative work), Feist found that artists (including writers) were more open to experience and less conscientious than non-artists. Artists' higher openness to experience meant that they were more aesthetic, curious, imaginative, sensitive, and original, and less conventional, rigid, and socialized. Artists' lower levels of conscientiousness meant that they were less cautious, controlled, orderly, and reliable (298). In comparison to scientists specifically, artists appeared to be more anxious, emotionally unstable and rejecting of social norms (299–300). The relationship between nonconformity and creativity was supported by a recent study conducted with a college sample, in which the need of participants to be different correlated with the creativity of their poems and drawings (Joy 274).

Beyond research on creative individuals and creative artists, what do we know about the personality of creative writers specifically? Research on the personality of creative writers was pioneered by Frank Barron and his colleagues at the Institute of Personality Assessment and Research (IPAR) at the University of California, Berkeley. Barron, for example, worked with a sample of 30 distinguished writers invited to spend three days at IPAR in order to undergo a "living-in" assessment. The personality of these

writers was examined using a Q sort technique, in which IPAR researchers each sorted a 100-item set of sentences according to how well they described each writer. The sorts were averaged to produce composite descriptions of each writer, and of the sample. Barron found that five items best described the writers as a whole. They had high intellectual capacity, valued intellectual and cognitive matters, valued independence and autonomy, had high verbal fluency and quality of expression, and enjoyed aesthetic impressions (158). In addition to these five traits, the writers were also judged to be productive, concerned with philosophical problems, to have high aspirations, a wide range of interests, to think unconventionally, to be interesting people, to be honest with others, and to behave consistently with personal ethical standards (158–159).

Piirto conducted an extensive qualitative study of writers included in the Directory of American Poets and Writers (7). To find out about their personalities, she collected and analyzed published interviews, memoirs, and biographies. Her study identified a number of distinguishing traits. First, writers tended to express high levels of ambition and envy. For example, Piirto cited writer T. Coraghessan Boyle's ambition to become "the most famous writer alive and the greatest writer ever" (quoted in Piirto 8). This level of drive means that writers may find it difficult to witness the success of others, which may in turn negatively affect their friendships with other writers. Second, writers in Piirto's study appeared to be highly concerned with philosophical issues, including the meaning of life, as well as the search for truth and beauty (10). Barron summarized this concern by noting that "creative writers are those whose dedication is a quest for ultimate meanings" (159). Third, Piirto's writers tended to display high levels of frankness, risk-taking, and political and social activism (10–12). Fourth, writers placed a high value on empathy, and expressed a desire to feel and communicate the emotions of others. Finally, Piirto noted that her writers tended to have an unusually keen sense of humor (16–18).

Aside from these five attributes, Piirto noted that psychopathology also appears to constitute a distinguishing feature of creative writers (12). Most of the research on this topic has focused on the association between mood disturbances and creativity. Andreasen conducted one of the first quantitative studies looking at psychopathology in creative writers. Over the course of 15 years, she carried out structured interviews with 30 writers (predominantly male) visiting the Iowa Writers' Workshop. The writers were compared with a group of 30 controls matched for age, sex, and educational status. Findings from Andreasen's study highlighted that a large majority of the writers (80 percent) had suffered from some kind of mood disorder at some point in their lives, which was significantly higher than the lifetime prevalence of affective disorders in matched controls (30 percent). Among the 30 writers, 43 percent had suffered from bipolar disorder, 37 percent from major depressive disorder, and 30 percent from alcoholism (1289). Bipolar disorder is characterized by an individual's experience of both episodes of depression – characterized by abnormally low levels of mood and energy - and episodes of mania or hypomania characterized by abnormally elevated levels of mood and energy (1289). The writers' first-degree relatives were also

more likely to have suffered from an affective disorder at some point in their lives, and to be more creative than the relatives of matched controls (1290).

Additional studies have found comparable results. Jamison found a significantly higher prevalence of all psychopathology and of affective disorders in particular in a sample of 47 British writers and artists than in the population at large (76). Similarly, Ludwig compared 59 female writers to 59 matched controls and found that the writers suffered from higher levels of depression, mania, panic attacks, generalized anxiety, eating disorders, and drug abuse ("Mental Illness," 1652). Ludwig subsequently conducted a large-scale historiometric investigation of more than a thousand eminent individuals. By examining their biographies, he found that poets and fiction writers had the highest lifetime rates of all psychological disorders, followed very closely by actors, artists, nonfiction writers, and musicians (*Price of Greatness*, 148). In addition, members of artistic professions were twice as likely to suffer from two or more comorbid psychological disorders as individuals in other professions (149). It is important to note, however, that there are numerous criticisms of the Andreasen, Jamison, and Ludwig work. To take one example, Rothenberg argued that Andreasen's control group was not well matched to the writers chosen; the creative group was comprised of faculty members from the creative writing department, whereas the control group had a wide mix of people (150). Andreasen was the sole interviewer, with no corroborating opinions about the mental health of the writers.

How might writing be associated with poor psychological outcomes? Given the relationship that seems to exist between creative writing and psychopathology, researchers have started to think about the mechanisms underlying this association. Individuals who suffer from psychological disorders may be more likely than others to self-select into the writing profession. Alternatively, third variables that have yet to be discovered may explain this association. It is possible, for example, that experiencing adverse events early in life such as losing a parent predicts both subsequent creative achievement and psychopathology (Simonton 155), without any direct link needing to exist between these two variables. Finally, writing may cause or exacerbate psychopathology. How might writing make individuals feel worse? Self-reflective rumination – the tendency to think repetitively about one's personal (often negative) emotional state – has been proposed as the mechanism explaining the relationship between mood disorders and creativity. Verhaeghen et al., for example, found that, in a sample of undergraduate students, depression was linked to increased self-reflective rumination. Rumination, in turn, predicted creative interests and creative performance by increasing both fluency and seriousness about one's creative activities. The relationship between depression and creativity was fully accounted for by self-reflective rumination – in other words, there was no direct relationship between the two (230). Further exploring the mediating role of rumination, J. Kaufman and Baer argued that the process of writing necessarily entails rumination about one's writing. Indeed, writers need to engage in careful, repetitive thinking about their choice of words and phrases, which often deal with negative emotional content to begin with. Writing may therefore become a form of deliberate dysphoric rumination, which may

prolong or worsen existing mood symptoms (274). The type of writing pursued, however, probably influences the extent to which writing constitutes psychologically damaging rumination. Writing may also provide an avenue for coming out of the vicious circle of rumination, by constructing a coherent narrative to make sense of painful emotions and experiences (J. Kaufman and Sexton 275).

Are there particular factors predicting the presence of psychopathology in writers? First, success seems to be associated with psychopathology. Nobel and Pulitzer Prize-winning writers, for example, are more likely to have suffered from psychological disorders than nonwinners (J. Kaufman, "Genius, Lunatics and Poets," 311). Second, particular forms of writing seem to be differentially associated with psychopathology. Across several studies, poets were more likely than other writers (novelists, playwrights, and journalists) to suffer from mental illness and die young, with female poets having notably higher rates of illness than their counterparts (J. Kaufman and Sexton 270). One explanation for this trend is that poetry-writing may not allow writers to form a coherent narrative in order to build meaning from their experience, and progress cognitively and emotionally. Indeed, poetry may only allow writers to express their strong emotions, but not to process them (277).

The findings summarized above paint a bleak picture of the mental health of creative writers. The truth might be more nuanced than that – indeed, creative writers' productivity is a sign of their resilience, psychological health, and ego strength. The notion that creative writers are "both sicker and healthier psychologically than people in general" (quoted in Piirto 12) was evidenced by Barron's finding that distinguished writers scored simultaneously high on pathological indices and an ego-strength index of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, a widely used personality inventory (Barron 159). Such a finding suggests that the experience of psychological disorders may directly or indirectly constitute both a curse and a gift for creative writers.

The Creative Writing Process

Beyond possessing particular individual qualities, creative writers succeed in their endeavors by engaging in specific behaviors that together constitute the creative writing process. Lubart summarized the existing body of scientific research on the creative writing process, pointing out that different stages and steps have been proposed by scholars (149). With regard to writing in general, Hayes and colleagues proposed three main stages. First, writers go through a reflection phase in which they plan out their writing, decide which themes they will emphasize, and start solving problems. Second, writers enter the production phase, in which they convert their ideas into written text. Third, writers go through a text interpretation phase, in which they read, listen, examine, and revise their text (Hayes and Flower 1107).

With regard to the creative writing process, two models have garnered the most attention. The first account is Wallas's four-stage model of the creative process: preparation, incubation (during which no conscious work is done), illumination (the "a-ha"

moment of insight during which ideas enter consciousness), and verification (Lubart 154). This model continues to serve as the main outline to understand how individuals find ideas and transform them into a creative output. Much research has been conducted to refine each of Wallas's stages, by including for example a phase of creative "frustration" before the illumination stage (155). Another popular account of the creative process is Finke, Ward, and Smith's Geneplore model, which proposes that creative work involves both generative processes (involving the production of original ideas), and exploratory processes (involving the examination, evaluation, and refinement of ideas produced) (Lubart 156–157). In addition, subprocesses are involved in both phases: for instance, writers begin by retrieving information from memory in order to generate ideas. Ideas generated can become original if individuals try to retrieve information beyond the path of least resistance (i.e. beyond what comes to mind first). To do this, individuals can be encouraged to think abstractly, to think specifically, and to combine ideas that are not usually combined (Ward and Lawson 208).

Research on generative processes has so far been much more prevalent than research on exploratory processes. This may in part result from the "genius myth" – the common view that creativity consists of extraordinary thinking occurring suddenly, via bursts of inspiration coming from the unconscious (S. Kaufman and Kaufman, "Putting the Pieces Together," 359). As a result of this conception, which suggests that creative individuals are able to spontaneously produce high-quality material, less research has been conducted on how writers revise their works and transform them from raw material into finished products. Yet, existing research suggests that the spontaneous productions of creative individuals are usually not without flaws, and that evaluation and revision play a critical role in creative thinking. According to Lubart, the creative writing process is better described as many small creative moments of insight rather than one "big bang" (158). Similarly, Sawyer emphasized the primordial role of hard work at each stage of the creative process, including editing, analyzing, and consulting with others (176). The necessity of revision is echoed by Lamott's textbook on creative writing, *Bird by Bird*, which states that all good writers start with "shitty first drafts . . . This is how they end up with good second drafts and terrific third drafts" (quoted in Waitman and Plucker 299).

How should these various steps be timed? When is the best time to start evaluating the ideas one has generated? Lubart noted that three theories compete with regard to this question. One camp argues that early evaluation is optimal, to efficiently get rid of useless ideas as soon as possible. Another camp proposes that late evaluation is good, to make sure that all ideas are given full consideration, and to diminish the risk that original ideas will be discarded as a result of being perceived as too risky. Finally, a third camp suggests that evaluation is best used cyclically, to allow for the development of original thinking while at the same time providing close monitoring (160). Lubart tested these three competing views by asking undergraduate students to write short stories in one of three experimental conditions or a control condition. In the experimental conditions, students were interrupted and asked to evaluate their

writing either early, late, or twice at different stages of the process. Results showed that students who evaluated their work early produced more creative stories than students in the three other conditions, suggesting that exercising critical thinking as early as possible in the creative writing process may be most beneficial (160).

How can the creative writing process be enhanced? Can writing even be taught? This common question stems from the popular view, drawn from an ancient aphorism, that "poets are born, not made" (poeta nascitur non fit) (Dawson 7). Yet, researchers and educators have begun to uncover concrete practices that can help maximize original thinking. We review here research on how beliefs about creativity, educational practices, play, writer's block, mood, and flow can be used to enhance the creative writing process.

A first approach to enhancing the creative writing process is to examine people's beliefs about creativity, and to dispel some of the myths that surround it. Waitman and Plucker noted that the creative process is often portrayed as mysterious and magical, giving creative writers "the sense that they must be hit with a kind of lightning-like inspiration to be able to conjure a text like those that inspired their own novitiate efforts at writing" (287). As a result, creative writers may often believe that they do not have full control over the creative process. Recent research on "everyday creativity," however, has evidenced that all humans use creative thinking processes all the time in their daily lives, and thus shows that these processes are not as enigmatic as they seem (Richards 190). Going further, Weisberg (5) proposed that even eminent creativity can be understood from the point of view of ordinary thinking processes, in contrast to the "genius myth" which suggests that creative thinking is qualitatively different from normal thinking (and therefore inaccessible to ordinary people). Creative writing can therefore be taught by helping individuals use skills that they already use in other aspects of their lives, and apply them to writing.

In addition to the myth of sudden inspiration, creative writers also tend to be exposed to the Romantic idea that they will work best alone, unconstrained by others or by conventions. Sawyer, however, argued that a close, impartial look at the creative process suggests that creators are necessarily and constantly interacting with their social and cultural contexts (168). This is especially true of modern writing forms (e.g. advertising, screenwriting, etc.), which have been far less studied than "higher" art forms such as novel and poetry writing. An examination of the creative process of eminent writers such as Shakespeare or Tolkien suggests that writers collaborate with others extensively at various points of their writing (173–174). Helping creative individuals benefit from their social interactions (rather than be hindered by them) therefore constitutes an important goal for researchers interested in enhancing the creative process.

In keeping with this, creative writers must cultivate a strong sense of self-efficacy and confidence in their abilities. Without such faith in themselves, aspiring writers may see their hopes crushed by negative evaluations from peers, teachers, and critics, in potentially humiliating moments of "creative mortification" (Beghetto). To prevent

promising but sensitive students from becoming discouraged, educators in charge of creative writing programs have moved away from the use of harsh critiques and evaluation. Instead, psychologically safe environments are being designed to help students find their voice and feel comfortable generating ideas of varying quality, for which they will receive constructive feedback (Chandler and Schneider 330). Baer and McKool nonetheless pointed out that educators are placed in an uncomfortable dilemma. While creativity thrives on intrinsic motivation and the absence of evaluation, teachers need to evaluate and reward students for their work, thus introducing potentially harmful extrinsic motivators (277). A number of good practices can however prevent extrinsic motivators from damaging the creativity of students. Importantly, teachers should set separate times for learning basic writing skills and learning how to think creatively. By teaching these skills separately, they can establish that the former set of skills, but not the latter, will be the object of evaluation. Instead, learning to think and write creatively can be presented as "just for fun" (Baer and McKool 282). In addition, when evaluation is necessary, feedback should be given in an empowering way that will maintain students' faith in their abilities and hope that they can succeed, rather than in a controlling and critical way.

Besides classroom teaching, what other practices can help students learn to think creatively? One interesting avenue of research is the hypothesis that pretend play constitutes a fertile training ground for creative thinking. Play consists of symbolic behavior in which people and objects are treated as though they are someone or something else. According to Russ, play is inherently related to affective processes, as it allows for the expression of emotions, stimulates the development of emotion regulation, and creates feelings of positive emotion and enjoyment (249). By putting us in touch with our emotions and desires, and by allowing us to engage in imaginary representations without constraints from what is possible in reality, play provides a good training ground for the generation of novel ideas (248).

Once writers understand the creative process and begin to work, what can prevent them from being successful? One issue of foremost importance with regard to the enhancement of the creative writing process is writer's block – the perceived inability to write that can cause high levels of distress and discouragement in writers. Anecdotal reports of writer's block are unfortunately common, but appear to often resolve with the occurrence of vivid dreams (Singer and Barrios 225). In keeping with this, blocked writers report engaging in lower levels of positive and constructive imagery, having overall less vivid mental imagery activities, and being more depressed and anxious than nonblocked writers (229). Consequently, a one-week experimental intervention using free waking imagery appears to lead to improvements (239–240). Writer's block comes in different flavors, and Singer and Barrios have identified four subtypes of blocked writers: writers experiencing high levels of emotional distress and wishing to avoid the solitude of writing (the *dysphoric/avoidant subtype*), writers for whom writing poses interpersonal dilemmas (the *guilty/interpersonally hindered subtype*), writers who lack the creative aptitude to meets the demands of the writing task (the *constricted/dismissive/disengaged subtype*), and finally, writers who harbor high levels of impatience,

hostility, and anger, and for whom writer's block elicits narcissistic concerns (the *angry/disappointed subtype*) (230–234). This typology points out that the processes involved in writer's block present important individual differences which may guide how one goes about addressing it.

Mood appears to constitute another important tool in enhancing the creative writing process. Given the importance of mood in the profiles of creative individuals, much research has been conducted to determine what kinds of emotions best foster creativity in general, and verbal creativity in particular. Overall, such studies have yielded contradictory results. Some studies suggest that positive emotions may enhance creativity, while others have found that negative emotions may be most beneficial. Positive emotions may increase creativity via a number of different mechanisms. First, positive emotions may broaden attention and increase cognitive flexibility, so that individuals can associate concepts or ideas that are usually seen as unrelated (Isen 13–14). Second, positive emotions may promote a playful approach to tasks that benefits creativity by encouraging risk-taking and experimentation (10). Third, positive emotions may increase creativity by fostering intrinsic motivation and persistence (Isen and Reeve 318). In contrast, negative emotions may increase creativity by decreasing biases in thinking and reasoning (Forgas 98–99), as well as by increasing persistence (Van Kleef et al. 1046).

Several factors may explain the presence of contradictory findings in the literature, including the type of task considered, the type of positive mood and negative mood used in studies, and individual differences in participants. Bartolic et al., for example, found that induced euphoria enhanced performance on a verbal fluency task, whereas induced dysphoria enhanced performance on a figural fluency task (680). Stafford et al. found that positive mood enhanced creative association-making only in extroverts, but not in introverts (831). Finally, Forgeard found that negative emotions enhanced performance on a creative caption-writing task only in participants low in depression to begin with. Inducing momentary emotions (both positive and negative) did not appear to enhance the creativity of captions produced by participants high in depression (908).

Mood may influence the creative process and, likewise, the creative process may lead individuals to experience desirable states providing reinforcement for creative behavior. So how does the creative process feel to writers, and can this feeling be used to enhance the creative process? Csikszentmihalyi conducted a qualitative study of highly creative individuals, including a number of eminent writers. These writers described experiencing "flow" during the writing process. Flow is a psychological state defined by the presence of both high skills and high challenges, giving individuals a sense of control over the activity at hand. Flow is characterized by intense focus and concentration, a merging of action and awareness, the feeling that the passage of time may be distorted in some way, and intrinsic rewards (110–113). Thus, when in flow, writers are able to exert a considerable amount of effort toward their work while at the same time being fully engaged and absorbed in the process. In spite of the effort dedicated to the task, flow allows writers to reflect back on the process as enjoyable.

Perry (214) proposed that writers can cultivate flow by using the following practices: First, the writing process benefits from being intrinsically motivated by the task at hand. Second, flow is maintained by getting regular feedback, allowing writers to know how they are doing and what they should be doing next, or at least to sense that they are on the right track. Third, successful writers report that they engage in rituals that help them focus their attention inward and prepare for writing (even if they are not consciously aware of such rituals). These rituals often help establish routines and schedules. An interesting ritual is the habit of stopping a work session in the middle of a scene, paragraph, or sentence, allowing the writer to know where to begin much quicker when work is resumed. Fourth, writers can preserve flow by using strategies to minimize anxiety about potentially critical audiences. Some writers manage not to think about the audience at all; others may think of the audience as a supportive, anonymous crowd. Yet other writers may place themselves in the role of the audience in order to utilize to their advantage an exterior perspective on their work.

Conclusion

The study of creative writing is a relatively new and exciting field of research in psychology. Psychologists have begun to uncover fascinating answers to questions such as: Who are creative writers? Why do they write? How do they write? What challenges do they face? What benefits do they reap? And how do we know when a text is creative? The present chapter offered insights from this growing body of literature, and proposed future directions for research in this area.

An important challenge for the future is to disseminate educational practices to foster creative writing abilities in students. While schools already teach students to write, a stronger focus should be placed on teaching them to write creatively. Teaching creative writing is of utmost importance in helping students develop a creative attitude toward life, and will help them develop the capacity to effectively deal with challenges in their daily and professional lives (Sternberg xvi).

Today more than ever, creative writing continues to be a passion for everyday and eminent writers. We hope that psychologists will continue to investigate the determinants and consequences of this passion, and participate in promoting its benefits. As a case in point for the power and appeal of creative writing, National Novel Writing Month (casually known as NaNoWriMo or NaNo), after less than a decade of existence, now motivates more than 200,000 budding writers each year to write an original novel of more than 50,000 words during the month of November. No fewer than 2.8 billion words were written during NaNoWriMo in November of 2010. Why would so many put themselves through writing such a large amount? One possible explanation is that "for one month out of the year, we can stew and storm, and make a huge mess of our apartments and drink lots of coffee at odd hours" (NaNoWriMo). But the reasons given by writers go beyond simple enjoyment. Indeed, "The

glow from making big, messy art, and watching others make big, messy art, lasts for a long, long time. The act of sustained creation does bizarre, wonderful things to you. It changes the way you read. And changes, a little bit, your sense of self. We like that" (NaNoWriMo).

Note

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Creative Writing around the World

Matthew McCool

I want my writing to be as clear as water. No ornate language; very few obvious tricks.

Andrew Motion

And yet it was quite clear that playing Go with a foreigner was very different from playing Go with a Japanese.

Yasunari Kawabata, *The Master of Go*

Literature not only delights, it also instructs. This maxim is of the utmost importance, as it conveys a truth that the written word not only transports us to a different time and place, but that it also has practical value. Stories and literature are bundles of wisdom packaged in vivid mental images. Love, sex, beauty, status, power, revenge, and violence are just a few of the things we expect from literature (Gottschall; Pinker, *The Blank Slate*). We enjoy these aspects of literature because they deal with those things that matter most. At the same time, literature takes place through the medium of language, and language interacts with culture. Thus, if literature takes place through language, and language is an engine of culture, then literature and culture also interact. This essay assumes the concerns that matter most to the mind, goals that affect the entire human species, are presented in language that reflects the culture in which it originates.

Although all members of our species have the same set of ambitions, culture has something to say about how these goals are achieved. Your goal of earning a doctoral degree may be countered by someone else's goal of being wealthy. Both goals speak

to the concern for status, but they reach these ends in very different ways. Culture is similar in that it gives us rules about the kinds of goals we find most important, and how best to go about achieving them. This is not to say that everyone adheres to every rule of a society, or even most of them (Durkheim). Individuals are certainly free to pick and choose those rules or maxims they find most useful or important. Some cultures, for instance, advocate for status based on personal achievement, while other cultures strive for status through family name or ascription (Hofstede). The point is that status can be achieved in multiple ways, and agreement on these kinds of goals is a mixture of individual desire and social pressure.

At the root of these deep cultural differences is a tacit understanding of how people communicate, especially in writing (Connor). As we will see, not everyone on the planet has the same assumptions about the power of language, what it should be used for, how it is supposed to be applied in complex social situations, or what happens when you put it into print. These factors converge on an understanding that cultures do not write using the same strategies because they do not strive for the same goals. Basic assumptions about nouns, verbs, adverbs, overwriting, and underwriting are just a few of the ways that cultures differ when they communicate in writing (McCool). My goal for this essay is to convince you of this argument, and then to offer a few thoughts on predicting how language will come to be understood in terms of creative writing and world literature. Before getting to that point, though, we need a basic understanding of how cultures use language to communicate, and to then transfer this knowledge to different writing strategies.

What Is Culture?

When the March 11, 2011 Tōhoku megathrust earthquake and tsunami devastated Japan's eastern coastline, comparisons were made almost immediately to the 2005 Hurricane Katrina in the United States. People from around the world marveled as the Japanese stood in long lines for hours on end, patiently waiting for basic supplies such as bread and water. After people who waited for many hours found out that supplies had been depleted, they did not resort to looting or violence. Instead, they simply went on their way. Journalists from China, the Philippines, and the US were quick to note Japan's patience, honesty, and good will (Beam 2011; *Japan Today*; Takei). Theories to explain this difference came from many directions, but most settled on the notion that the Japanese are a group-oriented culture. Unlike individualistic Americans, Japanese believe in sacrificing the self for the group (Condon and Masumoto; Sadri and Flammia).

Viewing culture in this broad "big picture" sort of way is not the only view one can take. Some people think of culture in terms of its classical sense, as in that which is considered fine or elite. An in-depth understanding of painting, poetry, and classical music might fall in this category. Another way to approach culture is from a popular perspective, as in movies, television, and radio. A third way might be to think of

Table 22.1 Three basic aspects of culture: social
relationships, communication strategies, and authority

individualism	collectivism
direct communication	indirect communication
authority minimized	authority emphasized

Source: Adapted from Condon and Masumoto; Hofstede;
Thatcher.

culture in terms of food and music. Sushi and taiko drums are found in Japan, but they do not tell us much about its people or culture. For our purposes, then, culture is defined as a group of people who share local expertise that, for better or worse, is loosely drawn at the borders of countries. This is not without problems, although it has enormous practical application (Hofstede). While it is important to pay attention to individual trees, our view is going to be the forest.

When social scientists think of culture, they are usually talking about aspects of behavior regarding relationships, communication strategies, and hierarchies. Individualism and collectivism are used to help explain strategies for obtaining status and maintaining social relationships. Direct and indirect forms of communication address different assumptions about the kind of information that is shared, how it is communicated, and even who is responsible for decoding the message. The third dimension, social hierarchies, refers to assumptions about equality and rank (Hofstede). These are only three of the many possible dimensions to culture, yet they are among the most important (Table 22.1).

Status may be acquired and social relationships maintained through what may be called individualism and collectivism. Individualistic cultures believe in treating people as individuals, with unique aptitudes, traits, and abilities. Status is achieved rather than granted, and social relationships are maintained by trying to minimize hierarchies and rank (Sadri and Flammia; Stewart and Bennett). An employee at a bar with a manager would not feel obliged to pour his boss a drink, and would expect to be promoted on the merit of his accomplishments rather than the school he attended. Collective cultures believe in treating people as members of a group, with similar aptitudes, traits, and abilities. Status is granted rather than achieved, and social relationships are maintained by reinforcing hierarchies and rank. In collective cultures such as Japan, an employee out with a superior is expected to pour drinks for his boss, and expects to be promoted for his loyalty, work ethic, and his ability to maintain group harmony (Condon and Masumoto). Neither of these cultural values is better than the other, although they have different assumptions and goals. Culture is never so simple, but this continuum helps explain basic overall differences in the ways people interact with others. But people do not just go to work and have drinks; they also use language to communicate.

At one end of the spectrum is direct or low context communication. Language is seen as an ideal medium for exchanging information, which is why people from low

context cultures tend to view it as a digital medium. Low context or direct commu-
nication strategies are linked with societies that have a lower need for saving face,
and tend to underappreciate the many hidden meanings packaged in a message. This
is not to say that low context cultures exchange information like digital computers,
but the analogy is not altogether wrong (McCool, Thatcher). At the other end of
the spectrum is high context communication. Here, language is seen as an imperfect
medium for exchanging information, and more meaning may even be found in what
is left unsaid (Condon and Masumoto, McCool). People from high context cultures
tend to view language as an analog medium (McCool). High context or indirect com-
munication strategies are linked with societies that have a higher need for saving face,
and that tend to over-appreciate the many hidden meanings packaged in a message
(Condon and Masumoto, Thatcher). This does not mean that high context cultures
exchange information like pantomimes, but the example is not entirely wrong.
Although the link is imperfect, direct or low context communication strategies tend
to be associated with individualistic cultures. Indirect or high context communication
strategies tend to be associated with collective cultures (McCool). Social relationships
and communication strategies are also associated with proper ways for interacting
with superiors, a measure in the distance of power.

The third and final dimension of culture to be addressed is known as power distance,
or authority ranking, and it can be an especially tricky aspect to come to terms with.
Some societies are called low power distance, which is the tendency to minimize the
difference between superiors and subordinates. The presumption behind low power
distance societies is that people are more or less the same, which facilitates the notion
that people are also equal. Although superiors carry more weight and enjoy higher
status and rank, they are perceived as more effective by subordinates if they try to act
just like them. In the classroom, students who evaluate a teacher as being just like
them are giving tremendous praise (McCool). But other societies may be called high
power distance, which is the tendency to maximize – or at least emphasize – the dif-
ference between superiors and subordinates (Hofstede, Thatcher). The presumption
behind high power distance societies is that people are innately different, which aids
the notion that people are also unequal. Superiors are perceived as good managers
when they assume an instructive, protective, and vertical relationship with their
subordinates. In the classroom, students who evaluate a teacher as wise and all-
knowing are giving the highest compliment. If there is a need to find a connection,
low power distance is typically associated with individualism and direct communica-
tion. High power distance is typically associated with collectivism and indirect
communication.

These dimensions may seem fine, although breaking down culture in this way is
not without problems. No doubt there are many people in more individualistic socie-
ties who communicate primarily in an indirect fashion (a common strategy in academia
in North America, traditionally a low context culture), and treat superiors with defer-
ence and subordinates with disdain. Similar problems may arise among some people
from more collective societies, where one may speak directly without much concern

for authority and rank. Although these complexities make a basic understanding of culture seem problematic, or even hopeless, they are actually cause for appreciation. Just as with people, trying to understand culture is fraught with an endless string of variables that always keep you guessing. Culture is complex for these very reasons, which makes any intercultural success all the more enjoyable (Sadri and Flammia).

These three dimensions are just a few of the many ways to understand what makes a particular group of people tick. More interesting, though, is the link between culture and the way people write. As we will see, culture is related not only to communication, but also to writing (Connor, Kroll, McCool, Thatcher).

Intercultural Writing

Many people believe that effective communication, especially writing, is based on a universal set of laws or principles (Williams). Writing should be clear, concise, and concrete. Sentences should flow smoothly from one to the next. Paragraphs should also flow, an effect made possible by transitional sentences at the beginning and end of paragraphs. These same people believe that the logic of an essay should be linear, proceeding from one natural point to the next, with no gaps in between (Connor, McCool). There is no question that this type of writing is effective and admired. It is my claim, however, that this kind of writing is prized only among certain people, and these societies just happen to be the ones that use English as their native language (Table 22.2).

Linguists often divide writing strategies into three types but, in the name of simplicity and space, we will look briefly at two. The first type is called writer responsibility, which places the onus of communication on the writer. Elements of writer responsibility include a clear and logical connection between sentences and ideas. The syntactic logic of writer-responsible prose is *AB/BC*, which is when a sentence begins with an old idea and ends with a new one. The first sentence overlaps with the second, which creates a seamless transition. People in linguistics, intercultural pragmatics, and contrastive rhetoric largely agree that this pattern is easy to follow, and probably

Table 22.2 Differences between reader and writer responsibility

Writer responsibility	Reader responsibility
AB/BC syntactic structure	*AB/CD* syntactic structure
clear, concise, concrete	flowery, ornate, narrative
logic of deduction	logic of quasi-induction
individualism, direct communication, authority minimized	collectivism, indirect communication, authority emphasized

Linguists typically call these parallel syntactic progression and sequential syntactic progression – or just parallel and sequential progression.

speaks to the problem of finding a common language among diverse readers. This is why writer responsibility is associated with clear, concise, and concrete language, and follows an overall pattern of logical deduction (McCool).

The second type is called reader responsibility, which places the onus of communication on the reader. Elements of reader responsibility include a clear but somewhat illogical – at least in a technical sense – link between sentences and ideas. The syntactic logic of reader-responsible prose is *AB/CD*, which is when a sentence begins and ends with a different idea. The first sentence may but often does not overlap with the second, which creates "gaps" that must be inferred by the reader. Many linguists agree that reader responsibility is clear and effective, and follows a logic of its own. This is probably because reader responsibility tends to be found among homogeneous societies where large groups of people share a great deal of cultural, historical, and linguistic background (Connor, McCool, Thatcher).

Some people disagree about how best to wrestle with reader and writer responsibility. Viewed from an opposite perspective, reader-responsible prose is airy, disjointed, sometimes convoluted, logically fallacious, and assumes too much from the audience. Similar difficulties are encountered with an opposite view of writer-responsible prose, which seems simple, obvious, possibly condescending, and may even appear to speak down to the audience. There is merit to both of these perspectives, and that is precisely the point (McCool). Effective writing in the US is categorically different from that in Japan, although both are equally good. Knowing the differences between reader and writer responsible prose is helpful for the practical concerns of life, but it may not be entirely clear how intercultural writing may help us understand creative writing and world literature.

In the next and last section of this essay, we will make connections between culture and creative writing through the product of two authors well known in world literature. Although our efforts will be met by a few challenges, it is possible and even worthwhile to see how literary prose shapes and is shaped by the language and culture of a given society. Our journey will take us to two authors on opposite ends of the globe – the United States and Japan.

Language, Culture, and Creative Writing

Japanese author Yasunari Kawabata and American author Ernest Hemingway were both born in 1899. Both won the Nobel Prize for Literature, Hemingway in 1954 and Kawabata in 1968. Both suffered serious health problems toward the end of their lives, and both checked out by suicide. In the most important areas, their lives seem to be remarkably similar, yet they are split by a profound difference in culture. As we will see, the relationship between language and culture is also linked with individual authors, which provides a fascinating lens through which to think about creative writing and world literature. Our story starts with Kawabata's *The Master of Go*, a novella that sealed his place in the annals of letters.

The novella is based on a series of dispatches that Kawabata sent to a Japanese newspaper in which he followed the actual 1938 retirement game between master Honinbo Shōsai and his younger opponent Minoru Kitani. The elder Shōsai, known throughout the story as the Master, is at the end of an illustrious career steeped in rite and tradition. His younger opponent, Otaké, is a rising star on the competitive circuit, and seems to lack respect for tradition and the ways of his elders. In the end, Otaké bests the Master in a game that lasts six months.

Go is a game of time, respect, instinct, authority, and tradition. Often compared with the Western game of chess, which may take mere hours to complete, a game of Go may take days, weeks, or even months. A sense of time in a game of chess is altogether different than in a game of Go, but that is not their only distinction. There is also a deep sense of culture, which can be seen in various layers of meaning. On one level, the story is the explicit chronicle of a famous and noteworthy match between two outstanding players. On another level, the story reveals the complexities of seeing the young replace the old, an especially tricky problem in a culture of filial piety and vertical relationships. A third layer or level of analysis also addresses the problem of reconciling the ancient and modern, the difference between tradition and convention. Although less common, some readers think of the story as a symbol for Japan's loss in World War II. This theory has some merit because Kawabata began work on the novella before the war and did not finish until it was over. Whether explicit or implicit, there is no question that the aging master and his younger opponent symbolize a shift in cultural thought.

All three of these problems – health, inadequate respect for one's elders, and emphasis on the future instead of the past – are compressed into a scene early in the book (Kawabata):

> Because of the Master's illness and for other reasons, numbers of disagreements arose, and Otaké's manner, as he repeatedly threatened to forfeit the match, carried suggestions of an inability to understand the courtesies due to an elder, a want of sympathy for a sick man, and a rationalism that somehow missed the point. It caused considerable worry for the managers, and always the technical arguments seemed to be ranged on Otaké's side.

This passage is telling because it reveals something important about Japanese culture, the game of Go, and how both are positioned in world literature. Otaké's continued threats to forfeit the match were seen as an act of aggression because it symbolizes a lack of cooperation. In collective cultures such as Japan, one should have respect for their elders, regardless of rank or position. A student who goes on to be more successful than his professor will nonetheless continue to show respect and deference until the end of his life (Davies and Ikeno). Otaké's inability, or unwillingness, to follow this social code puts him at odds with those in the Master's circle. But Otaké is perceived not only as a brash youth eager to rebel against social convention; he is actually seen as bringing a strange kind of "technical" thinking to the game. The word is

never used in the novel, but Otaké is being "analytical," and one of the traits of an analytical mind is distancing oneself from a problem.

The biggest problem, though, is Otake's reluctance to follow the Japanese custom of deference to one's elders. Japan is a collective culture that goes to great length to emphasize what is known as *wa*, or harmony (Davies and Ikeno). Cultures are collective for various reasons, but in Japan it has a lot to do with location. Japan is a small island country, which means it is in an interesting global position. Its small size and dense population means its few resources must be used efficiently and effectively. The island is also located next to monolithic countries in Asia, such as China, which puts it in precarious political uncertainty. Japan is also at the crosshairs of several continental shelves, which means it is susceptible to natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis. All of these geographic and political factors, including limited land use in agriculture, means that the Japanese have long had a need to maintain cooperation and social harmony (McCool). Making sure that people get along, the harmony of *wa*, is without question a natural product of Japan's dense population and geographic position (Davies and Ikeno).

Japan's geography, culture, language, and population density help explain the problems between Otaké and the Master. Keep in mind that Kawabata was not so much writing a novella as he was reporting on a story about a real game of Go. Before Kawabata published his novella, in fact, he dispatched vignettes of the game to the Mainichi Shimbun newspaper chain, first headquartered in Tokyo. The fact that he was compelled to turn it into a novel, and that it was particularly well received by the Japanese public, speaks to basic assumptions about what compels a Japanese person. Deference to authority, respect for elders, an emphasis on feeling or intuition rather than analytical thinking, and the extraordinary tension when these do not take place say something important about the Japanese mind (Davies and Ikeno).

There is little question that Kawabata was tapping into something deep and ethereal when he made this famous match into a novella. But there remains one word that seems to capture Japan so well that it would be remiss to overlook it, and that word is *aimai*. This word roughly translates as a kind of ambiguity, especially in terms of communication and personal opinion (Davies and Ikeno). Although ambiguity can be instrumental in maintaining group cohesion and social harmony, it also speaks to a higher order issue of analytical thinking. It is not so much that the Japanese do not think critically or have personal opinions. Instead, the Japanese simply have a strong social convention to avoid such topics in public. Although *aimai* is typically reserved for ambiguity in communication, it has a natural place in Kawabata's novella. Consider a game of chess, which has 64 squares and 32 pieces. Although chess seems like a fairly simple game, at least in terms of pieces and squares, the number of possible games actually exceeds the atomic complexity of the known universe (Pinker, *How the Mind Works*). A game of Go, with its larger board and many more stones, has a complexity of a much higher order. Such magnitudes are difficult for the mind to process, which means that even human supercomputers must be humbled by the awesome complexity of Go. This is also why a game of Go can take weeks or even months to

complete, not to mention the difficulties of scoring such matches by hand before the advent of computers. With these variables in mind, there is no question that Go is also a symbol for the analytical ambiguity captured in *wa*.

Perhaps the best illustration of the difference in American analytical thinking and Japanese intuition, or feeling, is from Kawabata himself. At a later point in the book, he issues a stunningly brief yet profound statement on the state of Go in Japan. More than any other point in the story, it is perhaps his most telling passage: "From the way of Go, the beauty of Japan and the Orient had fled. Everything had become science and regulation."

Keep in mind that Kawabata began his book before the war and finished after. Although Japan is a technical and scientific superpower today, its history is not one of cutting-edge innovation. Shintoism, in fact, which is a religion steeped in the natural world, is hardly the sort of doctrine or philosophy one expects from an empirical mindset (Smith). Yet, at the apex of their game, Kawabata provides a nearly tragic analysis of not only Japan's insularity, but also its startling openness. The game of Go, and perhaps Japan as a whole, seems to morph from a land of imperfect beauty, so-called *wabi-sabi*, to a cold and calculating computer. Through the eyes of its elders, Japan had ceased to be a socially inclusive island nation. It had become a monolithic machine.

The fact that this touched something deep in the Japanese psyche speaks for itself. It is not only the difference between age and youth, the old and the young. It has something to do both with the cycle of life, and the way that some cultures can be forever transformed. Consider what happens when people emigrate to other countries and negotiate extraordinary linguistic and cultural pressures. Added to this is the apparent loss of immediate family and friends, or at least the ability to see them quickly. Even in an age of electronic information, the internet and email, and an ability to hop onto a jetliner at a moment's notice, there is something a bit unsettling about being on the other side of the planet. It is not simply a matter of being so far away, since a 14-hour flight is really no different than a 14-hour drive. The difference is much deeper, writ not only in a society's bones but also in its language and culture. The leap from one place to the next can be immense.

Kawabata was an extraordinary writer who left this earth too soon, but he at least left behind a few literary gifts. If *The Master of Go* seems too foreign, then consider our second novella. Instead of the exotic East, as some people have been known to say, we are in the ordinary West. Our journey takes us to that space between the US and Cuba. But before touching warmer climes, consider one last passage from Kawabata's work:

> Quite aside from matters of skill, I sensed no response, no resistance. There was no muscular tone in his play. One always found a competitive urge in a Japanese, however inept he might be at the game. One never encountered a stance as uncertain as this. The spirit of Go was missing. I thought it all very strange, and I was conscious of being confronted with utter foreignness.

This passage details the strange but otherwise innocent play of a game of Go with a foreigner, in this case an American. The scene goes on for several pages, but the passage speaks for itself. The narrator is puzzled by the American's willingness to engage in many games of Go, seemingly unharmed by his inferior play. Our Japanese narrator cannot quite figure out why his opponent continues on with such a cheery disposition, content that he must be learning something important about this strange and new game. The narrator seems concerned that his American adversary seems to lack a "competitive urge," but perhaps this is because the foreigner is accustomed to making friends easily. Such is the case among individualistic cultures, a people who fluidly navigate novel social circles (Stewart and Bennett).

You may have noticed the epigraph for this essay is from Andrew Motion, the former Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom and author of the foreword of this very book. "I want my writing to be as clear as water," he says, "no ornate language; very few obvious tricks" (British Council). Motion's quote rings true, but perhaps that is because I am an American speaking my native language of English. When it comes to linguistics and writing, a person's native language can say a lot about how that person thinks, or at least what they value. Such is the case with Andrew Motion, a British national by birth. So why should his quote be so important?

The answer to that question can be found in just about any book on English language writing and linguistics (Connor, McCool, Williams). I will briefly discuss one of the more popular books on the US market, which is Joseph Williams's *Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace*. I have already read the book, although there was little need to go through the trouble again. Its lessons are actually contained on the inside flap of the front cover of the print edition, with a few additional pointers on the inside flap of the back. The front cover gives such advice as "open your sentences with short, concrete subjects," "open your sentences with information familiar to your reader," "be concise," "control sprawl," "use parallel structures," and "above all, write to others as you would have others write to you." This probably sounds like terrific advice, assuming you come from Canada, the US, the UK, Australia, or South Africa. This is not to say that the advice is bad, or even wrong, but it surely puts the rest of the world in a curious situation (Connor, Kroll, McCool, Thatcher).

Consider the last tip, which is the goal of writing to others as you would have them write to you. On the surface, this seems like a difficult maxim to avoid, at least until you realize that most of the world would find such advice hard to stomach. The goal of writing the same for everyone, regardless of who that person may be, can only be true in a society that presumes equality among most or all of its people (McCool). As an American, I can tell you this tip is readily accepted by writing professors in the US. The same cannot be said of many other cultures, such as Latin America and most parts of Asia, because equality is not presumed. In these societies, group harmony and authority ranking are central to a well-run society (Hofstede). Thus, Hemingway shows his American writing patterns through his clear and concise prose, Williams's seventh tip.

Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* betrays an American style of writing in a nearly identical manner, namely culture. Consider the plot. An old man and a boy are friends. The old man is described as humble and proud, although he has caught no fish in 84 days. Because of the old man's poor luck, the boy brings him food. The old man teaches the boy how to fish, even though his days of fishing seem over. Nearly the entire novella is about hooking a marlin, which lasts three days. The old man sees the fish as a kind of brother, but vows to kill him and eventually succeeds. As the old man and the boy return to shore, a shark attacks the boat and starts eating the marlin. The old man tries to fight the shark first with a harpoon, then a club, and then a knife, although nothing but skeleton remains by the time they reach shore. With nothing left of the marlin, the old man falls asleep, where he dreams of lions.

The language and story are interesting on several levels, but perhaps most peculiar in terms of the characters. There are only two main characters, the old man and the boy. The old man is alone, trying to figure out how best to resurrect his youth or keep away death. The old man's solitary life reveals something important about his background, especially his culture. It is unlikely, or at least less likely, that an old man would be alone at the end of his life in a collective or group-oriented culture. In societies such as Japan, the elderly do not get shipped off to geriatric institutions or quietly disappear in solitude. Instead, elderly Japanese live with family, and usually their children (Davies and Ikeno). This is not some kind of burden or problem, although it might be perceived that way from an American perspective. And from a Japanese perspective, an old man who lives alone and leads a solitary life must have a very poor family indeed, or have been an unusually difficult person. Of course, none of these assumptions need be true if the old man's culture values independence, which makes it difficult for the elderly to live with their children.

As though he wrote it to contradict Kawabata, Hemingway's culture surfaces fairly early in the novella.

> Once he stood up and urinated over the side of the skiff and looked at the stars and checked his course. The line showed like a phosphorescent streak in the water straight out from his shoulders. They were moving more slowly now and the glow of Havana was not so strong, so that he knew the current must be carrying them to the eastward. If I lose the glare of Havana we must be going more to the eastward, he thought. For if the fish's course held true I must see it for many more hours. I wonder how the baseball came out in the grand leagues today, he thought. It would be wonderful to do this with a radio. Then he thought, think of it always. Think of what you are doing. You must do nothing stupid.
>
> Then he said aloud, "I wish I had the boy. To help me and to see this."
>
> No one should be alone in their old age, he thought. But it is unavoidable. I must remember to eat the tuna before he spoils in order to keep strong. Remember, no matter how little you want to, that you must eat him in the morning.

The old man worries about his solitude and isolation and the fact that he is going through the final stages of life alone. He does not seem to feel sorry for himself, but

there is no question that he does not feel connected to anyone in the world except maybe the boy. Such thoughts tempt, but he fights and moves forward, only to have them return yet again.

> Aloud he said, "I wish I had the boy."
> But you haven't got the boy, he thought. You have only yourself and you had better work back to the last line now, in the dark or not in the dark, and cut it away and hook up the two reserve coils.

There is a calm but utter sadness to his thoughts, a dogged self-reliance and stalwart individualism so typical of the American psyche. The American mind has been written about beautifully by a number of different people, but few have hit a nerve like Robert Putnam's article titled "Bowling Alone," which eventually became a book of the same name. In his article, Putnam provides a statistical account of America's declining socialization in which its people have become increasingly isolated. The trend, he says, is one that began during the mid-twentieth century, and has been on a rapid decline ever since.

Putnam advances his claim by explaining that Americans, and presumably most if not all individualistic cultures, have removed themselves from nearly every type of social function, including clubs, churches, sports, charity work, and politics. Putnam is not merely advancing a provocative theory about the American mind; he is warning of its precarious position and declining social capital. He argues that the only memberships actually increasing are found among organizations that wield strong political influence, such as the American Association of Retired Persons. While AARP's increasing membership seems to counter Putnam's thesis that American life has become increasingly isolated, it actually does nothing of the kind. In fact, AARP's growing membership has nothing to do with socializing and connecting with other people because the only thing people need to do is mail in a check. There are no meetings, no social functions, and no opportunities for meeting like-minded people. AARP is an economic and political group, not a social one. Hemingway is not writing in a vacuum; he is simply one member of a society that highly values individual identity and personal freedom, to the point of self-destruction.

One of the predictions of a theory of culture is that its deepest values and beliefs, though mutable, do not simply change overnight (Durkheim, Hofstede). Culture is deep and enduring, and it takes many generations for significant change to occur. This is why Hemingway's life in the early twentieth century can speak so well to us today. His language may be clear and concise, the sort of thing for which Hemingway is known. Yet, the old man's concerns are hardly odd or unusual. There is no concern that the young boy has been disrespectful to the old man, that any sort of tradition has been violated, or that intuition has been replaced by analytics. In fact, the old man is unconcerned with all of these things. He is simply old, unlucky, and at the end of his mortal journey, a time of severe sadness and isolation in a culture that does little to care for its elderly.

Culture is not the only way to look at literature and creative writing around the world, but it is one of the most critical. Language no doubt is important for understanding what makes a group of people the way they are, but few scholars today would be willing to assign any kind of linguistic determinism, the spurious notion that language shapes thought. Instead, language seems far more likely to reflect and reinforce values maintained by culture (Connor, Kroll, McCool, Thatcher).

It is difficult to pin down the creative writing process of the world's literature in a brief essay. The complexities are simply too great and the exceptions too numerous. On the other hand, there is some satisfaction in reining in this kind of complexity into useful terms. There is no question that Kawabata and Hemingway, similar in so many ways, also have enormous cultural differences. They may share the same year of birth, the Nobel Prize for Literature, declining health in later life, and a solitary suicide, but their work may as well have been from a different time and was from a different place. Their nuances are not simply linguistic, but also cultural, and they provide us with an extraordinary first lens into literature and creative writing around the world.

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Creative Hauntings: Creative Writing and Literary Heritage at the British Library

Jamie Andrews

Justine Picardie's best-selling 2008 novel, *Daphne*, merges the lives of the Brontë siblings, writer Daphne du Maurier, and a present-day graduate student researching the links between the two. Variations on the verb "haunt" and the noun "ghost" occur more than 50 times in the novel, and haunting – Cathy's spectral presence, Rebecca's ghost, both still felt in the novel's present-day scenes – provides a narrative and metanarrative frame that links Picardie's characters (both real and fictional), and their author, across the centuries.

The eponymous Rebecca is "haunted by the ghost of her glamorous predecessor" in the 1938 novel (*Daphne*, 14), while her creator, Daphne du Maurier, is possessed by the thought of her husband's mistress, and fears that "now her [previous] infidelity had come back to haunt her" (108). Du Maurier turns to the past, and to the life of Branwell Brontë, to escape present discontent, hoping that "she would be safer with historical facts; that these would guide her away from the slippery edges of the pool, towards solid ground" (216). However, Branwell begins to take hold of du Maurier, refusing to let her go when she tries to put her research aside: "if she did not tell his story . . . then it would haunt her; he would haunt her, sending her round and round in circles" (219).

As Daphne du Maurier's research into the lives of the Brontës progresses, she finds that her subjects are every bit as haunted as she is. Branwell relates his experiences in the supposedly haunted house of the curate at Haworth to his sisters; from which du Maurier identifies the "seed of an idea for Mr Lockwood's haunting when he spent

the night in Cathy's old room at Wuthering Heights" (*Daphne*, 320). Branwell himself, "the failure of the [Brontë] family," who turned to alcohol and died aged 31, was a poet and painter "haunted by his sense that he had achieved nothing great nor good in his life, by the spectre of his unwritten masterpieces, his unpublished novels, his unfinished paintings" (19).

Meanwhile, in the novel's present-day episodes, the first-person, unnamed narrator – a graduate student researching du Maurier's work on Branwell Brontë – finds parallels between her own life and that of Daphne increasingly dominate her consciousness:

> here I am, living across the road from Daphne's childhood home, not far from my own, in a part of London that has just as many ghosts as the Cornish coast or the Yorkshire moors . . . it hasn't escaped me, the parallels between my life and the heroine of *Rebecca*, the orphan who marries an older man, moves into his house, and feels herself to be haunted by his first wife. (*Daphne*, 48)

In *Daphne*, the haunting power of the literary past is transmitted in physical form through the survival, circulation, and (suggested) forgery of literary manuscripts. Just as the present-day narrator teases out the story of Daphne du Maurier and Branwell Brontë from literary archival collections at Exeter University, the British Library, and the University of Leeds, so Daphne du Maurier haunts the Reading Room of the British Museum. "People are often dismissive of librarians and libraries," Picardie's narrator acknowledges. "But," she continues, "isn't that where the best stories are kept? Hidden away on the library bookshelves, lost and forgotten, waiting, waiting, until someone like me comes along . . ." (50)

At a conference organized at the British Library in April 2012 by the working group on UK Literary Heritage,[1] a group that champions the importance of literary manuscript heritage, Justine Picardie elaborated on the importance – and powers - of literary hauntings:

> We're all haunted by the past; whether it's a haunting to do with those we've loved and lost, past disappointments, past joys. I mean hauntings can be intensely creative. But du Maurier was haunted by the Brontës, I suppose, just as I, as a reader and writer, have felt myself to be haunted by du Maurier and the Brontës amongst others.

In edited extracts below, Picardie discusses aspects of the creative force of manuscript collections, as both she and her characters have experienced it.

NEGOTIATING WITH THE DEAD

Margaret Atwood, a writer that I admire very much, said that everything about writing and reading is a process of negotiating with the dead. And I think it's absolutely true for all of us as writers, as readers, and as curators. I would take it a bit further and say it's not just about negotiating with the dead; it's about speaking to the dead even if the dead never say another word to us.

I started out studying English at Cambridge, and as an undergraduate was fortunate enough to have access to incredible original manuscripts. It's one of the great gifts that an undergraduate can have, and one of the things that I took with me from that experience was that sense of magic, but magic combined with something intensely physical. There is nothing more physical than a manuscript with writing and ink on it, because it is the visible evidence of a voice, of a previous life, that has remained: the dead still speak to us through that manuscript. And to touch it, to read it – they even have a smell, those manuscripts – is fantastically evocative. For quite a long time after graduating there was something about that experience of handling manuscripts, as well as the kind of voices that are left in your head from studying English, particularly at Cambridge when I did, which said that if you weren't part of the great tradition, if you weren't a great writer, then there was no point writing; it was better to do research, or to do as I did, which was to become a journalist – although everything that I did as a journalist was definitely informed by what I'd learnt at Cambridge about the importance of original research. As a journalist at the *Sunday Times*, I spent quite a lot of time in the reading room at the British Museum.

It took something intensely chaotic in my own life to allow me to see that there might be something less rigid than what I'd been taught as a student, something more creative in the link between what I felt about what I read, and what I felt as a person: and that was the death of my sister. She was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 32, and she died pretty rapidly from a very aggressive form of breast cancer. I started writing a book called *If the Spirit Moves You* – I didn't even know it was going to be a book originally, it was just writing. It wasn't journalism, it wasn't creative writing, it was just writing for my own sake really. I thought it was going to be entirely about my relationship with my sister and the relationship between the living and the dead that continues, even amidst the silence.

I found whilst I was working on that book that I went back to the archives that I had started out in as a young undergraduate, simply as a reader. One of the only things that I could read in that experience of grief was the *Four Quartets*, which returns to the subject that binds us all – which is love and loss, the living and the dead, the meaning of everything. I found myself looking at facsimiles of Eliot's original manuscripts. From that, and a purely free associative process that had nothing to do with publication or journalism or research, I ended up looking at some of the Freud Museum archives and the archives of the Society of Psychical Research. I was interested in seeing how academic research in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw the idea of the dead and the living speaking – looking at the work of Thomas Edison, of Freud himself, of Jung, and Arthur Balfour the prime minister, and a group of Cambridge academics who were also involved in the Society of Psychical Research. Just a tiny proportion of the vast amount of research that I did ended up in the book that I wrote, but I suppose it informed entirely my thinking in that book. And when I think about that book now, I suppose it provided a blueprint for everything that I've written since as a creative writer.

However, I do think all writing is creative. My most recent book is a biography of Coco Chanel, which drew heavily on the Churchill archives in Cambridge, the private archives of the Duke of Westminster, and also Chanel's own archives in Paris. I think that there is always an act of creativity; even when you're trying to be at your most

objective, it is a creative act to decide which subject to specialize in, what manuscripts tug at you most. There is a tug at the heart that takes place that leads you in a certain direction.

DU MAURIER WAS HAUNTED BY THE BRONTËS

The book that really brought a lot of my ideas together on this is *Daphne*. It is about Daphne du Maurier, but it's written in fictional form, although based entirely on my archival research both at the Brotherton Library at the University of Leeds, the University of Exeter's du Maurier collection, the Brontë collections at the British Library, and also at the Brontë Parsonage Museum. It's interesting to see the difference between properly catalogued archival material, and that held in private hands as well. Out of that came a novel, in part because I felt that it wouldn't be true to the process that I'd engaged in to pretend that it was all entirely factual.

I could have written a factual book based on it, but one of the things that fascinated me about du Maurier's exploration of the Brontë archives – and du Maurier herself ended up with a very large collection of du Maurier archives – was the process whereby a writer can be haunted by the past. We're all haunted by the past; whether it's a haunting to do with those we've loved and lost, past disappointments, past joys. I mean hauntings can be intensely creative. But du Maurier was haunted by the Brontës, just as I, as a reader and writer, have felt myself to be haunted by du Maurier and the Brontës amongst others.

Du Maurier in my novel is in a period of intense crisis in her own life, and this is something that resonated with me as a writer; her husband was having a breakdown, and she herself came very close to madness, and kind of wrote her way out of madness. At that this point, she felt that she was haunted by the ghost of her own most famous creation, Rebecca, and she worked her way out of that sense of madness by returning to the original manuscripts of the writers that she most admired, who were the Brontës.

She wrote a book about Branwell called *The Infernal World of Branwell Brontë*, which took her on a very strange and intense journey into the very shadowy world of Brontë manuscripts. At the British Library, there is the collection of T.J. Wise, who amassed a wonderful collection of Brontë manuscripts, and was the first president of the Brontë Society. He was also a forger and a thief, who destroyed some of the most wonderful of the Brontë manuscripts by tearing some of the little books apart and selling pieces of them to private collectors, and he also stole some manuscripts from the British Museum. It's rather wonderful that everything eventually was returned to the British Library as part of T.J. Wise's collection, so it's come back to its rightful home – though there are some important manuscripts missing that went into the hands of private collectors

Du Maurier, with no academic training or background, became a real literary sleuth and tracked a lot of things down, a lot of which she kept herself, I think. So the subject of possession, which of course A.S. Byatt wrote about so wonderfully, is one that interests me. The way we are possessed by the dead, and also the way through the manuscripts of the dead we feel that we can possess certain writers. It's the wonderful thing about institutions such as the British Library that, rather than possessing in a way that is secretive, these collections are now being opened out. And of course they are cherished, they are preserved in absolutely the right way, but I think the opening up of possession

is an incredibly important one, and one that I, as a writer, am immensely grateful for.
I know that whatever I write next, just as everything I have written before, will begin
in an archive. And out of that archive interesting and creative connections – wonderment
and magic – will emerge.

In her presentation, Picardie recognized the potency of literary collections, especially
manuscripts, to provoke new imaginative work ("hauntings can be intensely crea-
tive"), and her debt to "the catacombs of library archives" (as well as to their archivists
and librarians) is foregrounded in the "Acknowledgments" to *Daphne*: "Like the nar-
rator of my novel, I became utterly possessed by the story, and obsessed by the paper
trail of Brontë manuscripts . . . like her, I burrowed through the catacombs of library
archives and second-hand bookshops to discover lost or forgotten letters" (403). Picar-
die's immersion in the sometimes subterranean world of literary archives, and subse-
quent emergence with new creative work, is typical of a developing use and
understanding of literary archives and manuscripts. While Higher Education remains
a significant user group for such collections, institutions are beginning to work
actively to encourage Creative Users into their archives. The British Library's most
recent strategy document promises to "develop differentiated services for a small
number of focused areas which include for example . . . the creative industries . . .
We will monitor these areas as well as new research challenges as they emerge to
ensure our resources have maximum impact," (*2020 Vision*) and the Library recently
appointed its first Marketing Manager for the Creative Industries.

The reuse of literary collections to prompt new creativity is both consistent with
the creative spirit of the original documents, but equally opens up traditional reposi-
tories to a growing market. Reports by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport
and the Arts and Humanities Research Council point to the increasing value of this
sector, which comprises 6 percent of the economy, employing 2.3 million people, and
contributing a greater proportion of GDP than in any other country (DCMS).

The literary collections in the British Library have proved particularly fruitful raw
material for creative works, and the Library's unique Lord Chamberlain's archive of
texts for all plays performed in Great Britain from 1824 to date has been increasingly
exploited by theater practitioners. The texts of a number of unknown – or neglected
– plays have been discovered by researchers in the Lord Chamberlain's Plays collection.
Noel Coward's "The Better Half" was briefly performed in 1922, never published,
and only unearthed in the Library in 2007 (Thorpe). Crucially, the discovery was a
cue not only to academic consideration, but to a new production, and the same
dynamic was evidenced with the discovery of two unknown plays by playwright John
Osborne in 2008.

Although John Osborne's 1956 play *Look Back in Anger* was assumed by contem-
porary reviewers, and later theater historians, to be his debut, research in the British
Library revealed that *Look Back in Anger* was in fact Osborne's eighth play to be
written, of which two had already been produced before his "overnight" breakthrough
in 1956. The texts for the two produced plays – *The Devil inside Him* and *Personal*

Enemy – were identified in the Lord Chamberlain's collection, and in collaboration with the Osborne estate were published by Oberon, and given rehearsed readings at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. The narrative of lost work rediscovered in musty Library collections appealed to producers, and both plays were given major professional productions in 2010, were revived in 2011 on off-Broadway, and in 2012 in London. Reviews privileged the excitement of the literary discovery in the Library as much as they did the quality of the work,[2] showcasing the role of the static literary collection in new creative interpretation.

However, new work can be created from the archives as well as emerging from them; and in February 2012, the British Library announced that the Leverhulme Trust had awarded the Library its first Leverhulme Artist in Residence. Cabaret performer Christopher Green has been given free rein, and will trace the history of hypnosis – as both entertainment and therapy – through the Library's collections, building up to the creation of a new character "born from the archives" at a show at the end of the residency

In explaining his decision to look into historic collections for the source of new work, Green stated:

> I was delighted to be asked to be the Inaugural Artist in Residence and I think it's great that it's a live artist. The British Library has such a rich history across all disciplines, but it's often forgotten how strong its links with the stage and performance of all types are. I will be searching through these collections, plundering and plucking shiny objects that grab my attention. The British Library is a vibrant, exciting place to be – always packed with interesting people doing interesting things, banging away excitedly at their laptops. (British Library, "Christopher Green")

Green emphasizes how creative work in collections can be transformative for both artist and the host institution – "I'm going to be slowing them [users] down, putting them under and freeing them from everyday constraints" – and warned: "You might feel very different about libraries after this!"

Speaking on the same panel as Justine Picardie, Chris Green talked about his approach to creative research in Libraries:

IDA BARR: THE BIRTH OF A CHARACTER IN THE SOUND ARCHIVES
Taking a very broad view of manuscripts, picking up on what's been raised many times about the magical value of manuscripts, I think my approach to research is to focus on the magical; it's to be inspired. And in some ways I was thinking this morning, while listening to the earlier speakers, that I just had a sense of gratitude that so many people are spending so much time painstakingly cataloguing and acquiring collections, and then someone like me can come in and go, "oh that's nice, oh that's bright and shiny," and then make work out of it.
The first time I came to the British Library was with an aim to make a character. I just knew I was drawn to the Victorian music hall and I wanted to make a music hall character – I ended up making two. One was really, really rubbish, was just me putting

on a big fake moustache, and didn't go much further; and the other one has had a lot of legs, albeit rather arthritic. I was in the reading rooms and didn't realize that the collections were all integrated – I was looking on the computer for Victorian music hall source material, and then the National Sound Archive came up. So I went in and listened to a bunch of albums, including one that was recorded in the 1960s on the last day of the Metropolitan Music Hall. The story is that it was going to be knocked down the next day, and they'd invited a whole load of pensioners, and they all sat under umbrellas and it was dripping on them. They had Marie Lloyd junior in there, and a whole bunch of old music hall relics, and one of them was Ida Barr, whom I'd never heard of, and I was immediately inspired to resurrect her. I've had this whole career bringing her to life, and it's based on the fact that she had the most extraordinary voice which is sort of a bit posh, but a bit common at the same time. So that has been a model that I've followed many times.

LEVERHULME ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

At the moment I'm delighted to be the first ever artist in residence at the British Library. And again, I think my approach is to look for bright shiny things that excite me. I started in the Evanion collection, a collection of theatrical ephemera collected by a performer in the late nineteenth century, the first collection of ephemera that was acquired by the Library. It's quite moving that Mr Evanion needed the cash, and he lived on that for sort of several years; it kept him going, which is sobering for all performers to think about. I started with that, and there's been some really interesting source material there. I'm looking at hypnosis and hypnotherapy and the way that the two collide, so the science and the showbiz, and the way that these two come together. I suppose I am sort of pleading for ephemera, because I'm so inspired by that. And as somebody who makes ephemeral work – I perform it and then it disappears – I'm a great believer in the ephemeral. Collections of flyers, posters, all those things that are so disposable now are so eloquent in years to come.

I have come across some wonderful little gems already, and I'm grateful to the British Library for keeping these things. I've been looking at small pamphlets – neither a manuscript, nor a book – that hypnotists have written. Lots of stage hypnotists had long careers and they would produce little pamphlets they could sell after their shows for a small amount of money, so that they could go home with some hard cash in their pocket. They are stage hypnotists laying out their tools of their trade, without giving away too many secrets, so they're quite skilful documents in themselves. One of my favourites is more of a book than a pamphlet by a man called Henry Blythe, and it's one of the funniest books I've ever read in my whole life. A random chapter is "1969, the Year of the Wart," in which he just focused on curing warts. And each chapter starts with something like: "As I was relaxing in my surgery cum therapy room in Torbay . . ." – they're all brilliant.

So I've been inspired by lots of source material like this, and I'm also working on a project about the comedian and broadcaster Kenny Everett. So, in the last few months, I've seen some very odd objects that I didn't know the British Library had, including Kenny Everett's home recording studio, which is up in Boston Spa in boxes.

I was really delighted – just going back to the notion of the magical, and the connection with the past – to be taken down to the stacks to look at the music collections.

Various music hall hypnotists had songs, so I'm going to do work on researching those. There was a recent acquisition, the band book of Vesta Tilley, who was a music hall performer, and it's just come in: a leather-bound book that she would have carried to all her gigs and would hand to the band leader just before the show. They wouldn't have rehearsed – he would prop it up on his piano, and he would conduct the rest of the mini orchestra. This book was very battered, and I just held it – a piece of history, a connection with a whole performance legacy that I want to be part of.

In Philip Larkin's famous introduction to a seminar on modern literary manuscripts held at King's College London in 1979 he remarked:

> All literary manuscripts have two kinds of value: what might be called the magical value and the meaningful value. The magical value is the older and more universal: this is the paper he wrote on, these are the words as he wrote them, emerging for the first time in this particular miraculous combination. The meaningful value is of much more recent origin, and is the degree to which a manuscript helps to enlarge our knowledge and understanding of a writer's life and work. (*Required Writing*, 103)

The magical value is typically encountered – as both Picardie and Green attest – in a physical contact with an original manuscript; but it is far from a static force on behalf of the person who encounters it. It is, as Picardie recalls, "a tug at the heart that takes place that leads you in a certain direction," and this original magic is sufficiently powerful to conjure new creations. The terms, therefore, of Larkin's famous praise of manuscripts remains valid; however, the magical and the meaningful are ever more entwined. Through a "meaningful" encounter with manuscript collections – "enlarg[ing] our knowledge and understanding of a writer's life and work" – a certain magical alchemy is effected, and new creative responses are born. For libraries, accustomed to the one-way transmission of "magical value" to present-day academic researchers, new opportunities for new uses of their collections are presented. New users may navigate library collections in new ways; but the possibilities of digital access to archival collections must transform their access and searchability. As Justine Picardie notes, "the opening up of possession is an incredibly important one"; and just as writers must learn to respond to their Creative Hauntings, so must the guardians of these collections learn to acknowledge – and celebrate – new forms of Creative Possession.

Notes

1 The conference, "Manuscripts Still Matter," was held at the British Library on April 30, 2012.
2 See, for example, www.telegraph.co.uk/ culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/7719618/The-Devil-Inside-Him-at-the-New-Theatre-Cardiff-review.html and www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2010/may/12/the-devil-inside-him-review (both accessed Jan. 2013).

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Politics

Jon Cook

Discussions of the relationship between politics and literature or creative writing are likely to encounter a number of complications. One of these comes from an apparent conflict between two different perspectives. In one case, politics is everywhere in literature, from the smallest decisions a writer makes – a line length in a poem, a point-of-view in a narrative, whether a character is wearing a shirt open or closed at the neck – to the widest questions of genre and audience. Is the novel a bourgeois form? Is it still possible to write a lyric poem? These questions, and others like them, are felt to carry heavy political consequences. On the other hand, politics is thought about as exactly that which literature has to get away from if it is going to realize its potential for a playful spontaneity of creation.

One stance toward what I want to call the everywhere and nowhere problem is to argue that only clarity of definition in respect of its key terms – "politics," "literature," "creative writing" – will enable us to understand their true relationship. Readers expecting this kind of clarity in what follows will be disappointed. Instead the argument attempts a different kind of clarity, not of definitions, but examples. Some of the most prominent of these are essays that take poetry as their central genre. This approach begs a question about whether what can be argued about poetry's relation to politics might also apply to the genres of fiction. This question is taken up by way of reference to examples of both these genres, but also, more centrally, by way of an argument about the major role that an idea of resistance has played in some twentieth and twenty-first century thinking about the imagination which has moved across and between different kinds of writing.

In 1962 the German writer Hans Magnus Enzensberger published an essay called "Poetry and Politics." Characteristically terse and ironic in its tone, the essay offers a brief but wide-ranging history of the relation between state power and a literary form. It begins with what is almost a legendary source for discussions of literature and politics, the moment when Socrates in Plato's dialogue *The Republic* decides that most poets should be banished from the well-ordered state. The charge sheet is familiar: poets tell lies; their work provokes unruly desires; their depictions of authority can provoke mockery rather than respect. The threat they pose is twofold and involves both belief and emotion. Poets make us believe things that are not true, or they mock the beliefs that we should hold; and they stir up emotions that make us unfit citizens. Only work which affirms the good order of the state can be allowed. There can be no critical edges or intimations of dissent. What the state permits are "hymns to the gods and encomia to good men" (Plato 54). Most poets cannot be relied on to produce in this way. Their future is a door marked exit. The farewell to poets is, in Socrates' case, rueful and ironic. He hopes, at some stage, that they may be allowed back.

Enzensberger finds in this moment one epitome of the relation of the political state to poetry and an anticipation of a long, nightmarish and continuing history. In the process the rueful ironies of Socrates' dismissal of the poets get stripped away:

> Dully, monotonously, brutally, they [the maxims of Plato] clang through history with the terrible regularity of a steam hammer. They do not question what poetry is, but treat it simply as an instrument to influence those held in subjection, as something to be used at will in the interests of authority. (Enzensberger 63)

The steam hammer clangs on, and, of course, it doesn't just try to beat poets into shape. There is very little to suggest, in the 50 years since Enzensberger wrote his essay, that the justifications provided in an ancient philosophical text for the coercion of writers by the state have simply become anachronistic. The locus of attention may have moved on from the censorship and brutality practiced by the Soviet empire or apartheid South Africa, but the old habits persist. The half-yearly case list of the PEN's Writers in Prisons Committee runs to 91 closely printed pages. In its summary for 2011, there are reports from over 100 countries drawn from all regions of the world. Many of those listed are journalists and not all are obviously the victims of repression organized directly by a state power. Religions can be offended as much as states. Socrates' concerns about poets who mock the gods or question their existence show how the two can overlap. In PEN's case list some are accused of membership of illegal organizations, others of obscenity or blasphemy. Again and again the connection is made between writing something and being judged a threat to order. Sometimes the persecution amounts to no more than harassment, but trial and imprisonment are not uncommon, and, in a few cases, murder.

The evidence suggests that we have not passed beyond this coercive relation between politics and writing. Yet, of course, as Enzensberger acknowledges, Socrates'

arguments in *The Republic* do not point in just one direction. They are as much about a few poets who can stay inside the well-ordered state as about those who must be expelled. In taking on the role of censor, the state also takes on the role of sponsor or patron. It can do so for the reasons set out by Plato's influential successor and philosophical opponent. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle gave a cryptic indication of the constructive role that tragedy might play. Its effect was to arouse emotions of pity and terror, but also, once aroused, to bring them to a new composure. Aristotle named this process "catharsis" (64). The term's exact meaning has been extensively discussed, but its therapeutic implication is not in doubt. Tragedy enables us to comes to terms with emotions, rather than be in their grip. And if it does that it encourages the rational self-control thought appropriate to the good citizen.

Some centuries later the civic humanists of the European Renaissance made similar claims. The arts, by recalling the past glories of a city or nation, could induce a pride in belonging among its citizens. Or they could play an advisory role. Political rulers might find in a play or a poem cautionary advice about how they should behave and what errors they should avoid. When Hamlet in Shakespeare's play talks to the leader of a group of traveling actors about drama holding up a mirror to nature, it is exactly this kind of admonishment he has in mind. The play he subsequently creates will reflect back to Claudius – Hamlet's stepfather and the new ruler of Denmark – the crime he has committed in order to achieve power and drive him toward a remorseful acknowledgement of his guilt. The mirror of drama is imagined by Hamlet as a kind of trap: "The play's the thing/ Wherein I'll catch the guilty conscience of the king" (Shakespeare 669).[1]

Enzensberger's essay follows this story about the state's patronage of poetry but by a slightly different route. This again takes him back to classical sources, not in this case to the works of Plato, but to the rhetorical tradition, concerned with the analysis and classification of the different forms and occasions of persuasive speech. Among these was one devoted to the art of praise or eulogy. Out of this, Enzensberger argues, a form of poetry emerged that devoted itself to the flattery of the ruler. Based in the feudal relations of the lord to his vassal, the pact between the poet and his patron was not just based in servitude. The skills of the poet were needed to confer fame on the ruler, to show that his state was well founded and would endure. The poem was held to have the power to confer immortality on its subject. Its obverse was the threat of satire and mockery.

Enzensberger attends to this tradition for a number of reasons. One is to show that politics does not simply intrude upon poetry as an alien and forbidding force. It can, so to speak, stimulate it from within. The examples he cites come mostly from the work of German poets, but the tradition was pan-European, adapted to the circumstances of a republican or monarchical culture, where the prowess of prince, monarch, and general could be affirmed in different forms of art. The seventeenth-century English poet Andrew Marvell, for example, celebrated the return of Oliver Cromwell from a brutal military campaign in Ireland in terms that make Cromwell's violence seem both divinely inspired and inevitable:

Tis Madness to resist or blame
The force of angry Heavens flame
And if we would speak true
Much to the man is due. (274)

Marvell's poem is based on a classical model, the Horatian ode. Its couplets have a precise, wry tone. Their accumulation, across some 120 lines, seems to underline the inevitability of Cromwell's rise to power, at the same time as they seem to hold something in reserve, a kind of raised eyebrow about how violent that power can and has to be. Some modern readers have used this ambivalence to find in the poem a subtle criticism of Cromwell and his methods. This does not stop the poem from being an example of literary art of a high order put in the service of flattery.[2]

Why pause over this tradition? For Enzensberger, it provides a cautionary tale about what poetry can no longer do. In the epoch of totalitarian dictators, he argues, it became impossible to write a poem in praise of a ruler. This does not mean, of course, that such poems don't get written. He cites some examples written in praise of both Stalin and Hitler that put the traditional tropes of the genre to use: the whole world joined in praise of the leader, doves of peace flying into the air, the persistence of the great man's spirit after death, and so on. But it is not the overblown and derivative nature of these poems that condemns them. To think this way would be to imply that a better poem could have been written on the subject. They are instead impossible objects, poems that are not really poems at all. For Enzensberger, this constitutes an irreducible and objective fact about poetry's modern condition:

> The end of the eulogy of the ruler, that is, of an extreme political element in poetry, defies all political, psychological or sociological explanations. We are concerned with an objective fact: the language of poetry refuses its services to anyone who uses it to immortalize the names of those exercising power. The reason for this refusal lies in poetry itself, not outside it. (74)

We might recoil from the claim to objectivity made in these sentences and refer to the activities of different kinds of poet laureate by way of refutation. But the activities of praising monarchs who have no executive power are not what Enzensberger has in mind. That would not be for him a serious engagement of poetry and politics, more a kind of affectionate game. Instead he wants to argue that there is a condition of poetic language which sets bounds to what can and cannot be done in poetry if the poem is to make any claim to credibility. And this has nothing to do with the psychology of writers or their rulers, or with their class, gendered, or ethnic background. It cannot be contextualized in that way. Instead it is about a topic and a gesture – the ruler and his or her praise – that become impossible in a poem. If they happen, the poem falls apart. It becomes hollow, unconvincing, unintentionally parodic in a way that earlier examples, Marvell's poem about Cromwell for example, do not. That the language of poetry has become incompatible with the praise of the ruler is a salient

fact about poetry's modernity. It marks a moment in the history of what poetic language can and cannot include.

Enzensberger's arguments raise three related questions: about the nature of a writer's freedom, about the character of modern politics, and about the affirmative character of artistic imagination. The first of these questions addresses a recurrent theme about the extent to which freedom of expression in literature can be thought about at all without some account of responsibility. The second summons the consequences of different twentieth-century political catastrophes for the work of imagination. The third bears upon the question of whether in literary art, and the arts more generally, there is an affirmative power that does not have to become one with the affirmation of a particular political or cultural order. In exploring the interaction between these three questions, what follows will also track the emergence of a twentieth-century sense of writing as a form of "resistance." This has obvious political connotations. In some cases it may lead to the thought that writers and their works, like the fighters of the resistance in World War II, are engaged in acts of sporadic, targeted guerrilla warfare with the society around them. But the implications of the idea, as we shall see, go well beyond that.

The negotiation of what a writer's freedom amounts to is a complex theme in Enzensberger's essay. The invocation of Plato's *Republic* at the beginning of the essay reminds us of one of the ways that this question is most often addressed: as the limiting by states and religions of what they regard as a subversive potential in free speech. In discussions of the practice of this freedom, literary expression stands as a paradigm case. Writers test the limits of what it is permissible to say and, in doing so, give definition to what it means to speak freely. By doing this they create a heroic role both for themselves and for the literary works they create. As a result a distinctive aura surrounds certain novels, poems and plays. They become episodes in a history that opposes the claims of imaginative freedom to the forbidding power of authoritarian states and religions.

Enzensberger's essay brings out another aspect of this idea: the freedom of his chosen form, poetry, is at one with its capacity for resistance. And what must be resisted are the pressures of any political ideology, whether it be conservative or radical. He praises a poem by Brecht called, in translation, *Changing the Wheel* because "it expresses in an exemplary way the fact that it is not at the disposal of politics: this is its political content" (78). The brevity of the poem's style – its first three lines, in translation, are "I sit by the roadside./ The Driver changes the wheel./ I don't like where I came from" – is one of the manifestations of this "political" resistance to politics (78). Literary utterance has to keep itself to a minimum, as if to be expansive or prodigal with words is already an indication that the work is in the grip of a political ideology or message. Once caught in this grip, the poem loses another important margin of freedom: its potential to have "unpredictable effects, calculable by no one . . . like those of a trace element or a shower of tiny spores" (80).[3]

This idea of the poem as an act of resistance is not something that Enzensberger, at least, wants to identify with explicit statements of political commitment by a

writer. He is wary of what he calls "congresses where booming bards announce world revolutions in the language of poeticizing birdwatchers" (81). Instead he returns to his paradoxical insistence that the politics of poetry consists in its refusal of politics:

> What distinguishes the poetic from the political process has been growing clearer over the last hundred years. The greater the pressure to which poetry is subjected, the clearer this difference becomes. Its political mission is to refuse any political mission and to continue to speak for everyone about the things of which no one speaks, of a tree, a stone, of that which does not exist. (81)

These large claims seem to beg some equally large questions. What is it about the two processes, poetic and political, that has made them more and more distinct in the period of modernity? And why has this increased the pressure placed upon poetry and not diminished it as the thought about distinction and separation might imply? Wouldn't it be truer and clearer to argue that poetry, and literature more generally, have enjoyed "over the last hundred years" an ever greater measure of freedom from political pressure, a freedom that tends to throw its abuse, when it happens, into ever greater relief? Perhaps the stress placed upon the poem as an act of resistance or refusal is, after all, a worried response to the fact that, under conditions of modern freedom, a poem can be and say anything it likes.

One answer to these questions comes from understanding the conception of politics that pervades Enzensberger's "Poetry and Politics" and provides the necessary counterpoint to his notion of the resistant poem. In this view, politics is not a process directed by principles of justice and dedicated to the amelioration of human lives. Instead it is something monstrous, barbaric, and destructive. Enzensberger's version of the main content of politics, that is, like that of other writers in the second half of the twentieth century, is shaped by unprecedented acts of politically motivated destruction: the Holocaust, the Gulags, and the use of the atom bomb. Political states have at their disposal immense capacities for destruction. Their willingness to use them, not accidentally but as matters of deliberate policy, has put human life into a frightened, precarious state

There have been numerous analyses of this phenomenon. One of the most distinguished, Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, noted the special place of ideological argument in the development of a politics of terror. Her concern is not so much with the specific content of political ideas as the apparent logic of their articulation:

> The preparation of victims and executioners which totalitarianism requires . . . is not the ideology itself – racism or dialectical materialism – but its inherent logicality. The most persuasive argument in this respect, an argument of which Hitler, like Stalin, was very fond, is: You can't say A without saying B and C and so on down to the end of the murderous alphabet. Here, the coercive force of logicality seems to have its source; it

springs from our fear of contradicting ourselves. . . . Totalitarian rulers rely on the compulsion with which we can compel ourselves . . . this inner compulsion is the tyranny of logicality against which nothing stands but the great capacity of men to start something new. (Arendt 472–473)

Modern political states may lay waste to millions of lives, but they do this not just through physical terror but in disturbingly intimate ways. Arendt describes this as an "inner compulsion." We repeat in our minds and come to assent to the appearance of a logic that dictates hostility, deportation or murder in the name of "historical progress," "racial purity," or the need to "protect the nation against external threat." A word was coined to describe this process: "brainwashing." The problem with it, quite apart from its clichéd character, comes from the implication that the washed brain is somehow inactive or inert. This is quite at odds with Arendt's analysis of the ideological mind, busily at work with its logical abracadabra and fearful of being found in contradiction.

Writing a few years before Arendt, George Orwell discerned a similar force at work in modern politics but its main symptom was language rather than a perversion of logic:

In our time political speech and writing are largely the defence of the indefensible . . . Thus political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness. Defenseless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called *pacification*. ("Politics and the English Language," 153)

The rhetorical manipulation of language takes on a new and sinister cast, in Orwell's view, because its appeals are made through mass media. Orwell was both fascinated and appalled by the odd, hallucinatory force that words could assume under these conditions, whereby any doubt about their veracity was accompanied by the feeling that to question them was a hopeless task. Hearing a word, or hearing it seen and spoken by someone in authority, was tantamount to accepting its truth or, at least, being resigned to the inevitability of its dominion. It was a relation to language that he explored in detail in his novel *1984*, where skepticism about the slogans of Big Brother – "War is Peace," "Freedom is Slavery," "Ignorance is Strength" – is depicted as a secret that can be shared only under conditions of extreme risk. And, in a way that parallels Arendt's understanding of totalitarianism, state power in the novel is at once intimidating and intimate. The "telescreens," located in every domestic space, babble out their messages at the same time as they keep an eye on the inhabitants. Winston Smith, the novel's hero, adapts his behavior to these circumstances in a way that gives a new application to Arendt's understanding of "inner compulsion." Alone in his flat, and pausing after a day's work, he puts on "the expression of quiet optimism which it was advisable to wear when facing the telescreen." He does this almost without thinking, his response to a situation where "there was of

course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment" (Orwell, *1984*, 7).[4]

If, then, we accept for a moment the claim that an important element in preserving a writer's freedom lies in the capacity to resist what Enzensberger calls "domination," we can see how complicated this task can become if we also find a truth about modern politics expressed in the work of Arendt and Orwell. In a sense, what follows is banally obvious: the relation between literature and politics is mediated by that powerful, vaporous substance we call "ideology" as much as it is by the powers of censorship or patronage. We might, of course, think that both censorship and patronage are aspects of ideology, but ideology is much more than that. It seeps in everywhere and that everywhere includes assumptions about literary style and form. Brecht – this time in his work as a dramatist rather than poet – criticized the conventions of naturalist theater not because he wanted to demonstrate the originality of his own work but because he felt those conventions – the "fourth wall," the identification of the audience with one or more characters in the play, the fusion of actor and role – all conspired to inhibit that kind of critical reflection on the nature of power in society that he thought it the main purpose of drama to provoke. In his proposals for a new kind of epic theater the emotional relationship between audience and play would change in ways that broke the spell of empathetic identification. Resisting ideology, in this Brechtian view, was as much to do with changing the place of the literary work in the emotional lives of its audience as it was to do with expressing critical ideas or messages.[5]

One consequence of this twentieth-century understanding of the relation between writing and politics is a revision of what we understand the "creative" component in "creative writing" to be. Not only a matter of craft, technique, or self-expression, a crucial moment in the origins of a literary work lies in the imaginative and stylistic capacity to reject, filter out or keep at bay the demands of what, in some descriptions, can seem like almost everything. Another way of putting this is to say that the freedom of the literary work, its capacity to evolve in its own way and become whatever it needs to be, is incompatible with any sense of political or social obligation.[6]

This negative moment is not simply a property of poems, novels or plays that are associated with cultural radicalism. The American poet Wallace Stevens was, as far as we know, a conservative Republican voter. In 1942, he published an essay called "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," based on a contribution he had made the previous year to a symposium on the language of poetry. Like Enzensberger's essay on poetry and politics, Stevens takes a wide-ranging historical view of his subject. He, too, begins with Platonic philosophy, but not, this time, with the rejection of the poets from the well-ordered state, but something very different; the allegorical figure of a pair of winged horses and a charioteer, taken from Plato's dialogue *The Phaedrus*. Stevens takes this as an example of "Plato's pure poetry," but also what he calls, echoing an earlier poet, Coleridge, his "gorgeous nonsense" (257). The imaginative pleasure he takes in this allegory of the soul is tempered by the fact that he knows it

has grown out-of-date. We no longer believe in the soul in the way Plato did. As a result the figure "becomes antiquated and rustic" ("The Noble Rider," 257).

This may seem to take us a long way from any thoughts about the relation between literature and politics. In fact it is the way the question of politics begins to enter the essay. The antiquated character of Plato's allegory is one example of the way that "the pressure of reality" – a recurrent phrase in the essay and one whose implications are extended and varied with each occasion of its use – eats away at imaginative inventions, making them seem implausible and out-of-date. Stevens's essay is an extended meditation on how the imaginative use of words can be modern or contemporary and yet still inherit a value from the work of the past. He calls this value "nobility," a word with emphatic political connotations of aristocracy and hierarchy, and acknowledges that it, too, may have an antiquated sound. Yet he insists on the paradoxical possibility that a noble poetry can be written in the midst of a democratic society.

Stevens is emphatic in his rejection of what he describes as "a social obligation" for poetry:

> Unquestionably, if a social movement moved one deeply enough, its moving poems would follow. No politician can command the imagination, directing it to do this or that . . . The truth is that the social obligation so closely urged is a phase of the pressure of reality which a poet . . . is bound to resist or evade today. Dante in Purgatory or Paradise was still the voice of the Middle Ages but not through fulfilling any social obligation . . . ("The Noble Rider," 264)

There is a local context at work in these sentences. When Stevens writes of "the social obligation so closely required" he probably has in mind the justifications for writing that came out of the 1930s: the Federal Writers' Project, for example, with its stress on the need for a literature that would address the lives of the American poor in a clear and accessible style. It was exactly this sense of an obligation to an important subject that would make literature credible. It would be justified by its conscientious address to suffering that was in need of alleviation.

Stevens will have none of this. The "social obligation so closely urged" is connected to that recurrent phrase, "the pressure of reality." That pressure, according to Stevens, certainly includes what we conventionally think of as politics, but as he returns to and develops the implications of the phrase, it comes to include many things: "the extraordinary pressure of news"; "the consciousness of the world" as "concentrated on events which have made the ordinary movement of life seem to be the movements of people in the intervals of a storm"; "the impermanence of the past" matched by "an impermanence of the future" ("The Noble Rider," 261). World War II is obviously in the background of these formulations and is sometimes their explicit reference, but a single historical episode, however momentous, is not all that Stevens means by the "pressure of reality." On the one hand "the pressure of reality" is a historically recurrent force. Its presence is always felt when certain kinds of imaginative invention are

no longer felt to be real or convincing. It provokes those kinds of adjustments in style, technique or genre that bring the arts back into an alignment with reality. But "the pressure of reality" is a phrase with a specifically modern inflection. It is connected in Stevens's essay to modern urban experience and the development of communication technologies as well as to the experience of wars. As his essay becomes more immersed in contemporary circumstances, so he associates the "pressure of reality" more and more with violence. Modernity, for Stevens, is "life in a state of violence," whether the violence be physical or spiritual. The pressure of reality, in this modern sense, has penetrating psychological as well as political consequences:

> We are confronting, therefore, a set of events, not only beyond our power to tranquillize them in the mind, beyond our power to reduce them and metamorphose them, but events that stir the emotions to violence, that engage us in what is direct and immediate and real . . . and these events are occurring persistently with increasing omen, in what may be called our presence. (262)

It is just this violent excess of events that provokes the imagination to resistance. Stevens describes it in terms of a countervailing pressure: "a violence from within that protects us from a violence without. It is the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality" (267). If the push back is successful the effect, according to Stevens, will be a "cancellation" of the pressure of reality.

By referring to the imagination so often as the origin of poetry, Stevens summons a term from Romantic poetics, and at the same time gives it a new implication. In his *Biographia Literaria*, the Romantic poet, Coleridge, had described the imagination as "an esemplastic power . . . that dissolves, diffuses and dissipates in order to recreate." Here imagination is compared to a chemical reaction in which material is transformed, but this is presented as an essentially peaceful process of transformation. In a poem first published in 1802, "The Dejection Ode," Coleridge offers a similarly eirenic account of the imagination, but this time in terms of a process of giving and receiving (*Selected Poems*, 180):

> O Lady! we receive but what we give
> And in our life alone does Nature live

Coleridge's poem is written out of a grief-stricken sense that he has lost the capacity for this kind of exchange; that's why his poem has the title it does. The imagination in Romantic poetics has its own kind of fragility. It will mysteriously desert the poet and hence become known most poignantly through its absence. It can of course be threatened by the intrusions of society, but on nothing like the scale nor with the violence proposed by Stevens. The imaginative act envisaged by Coleridge does not have resistance at its core, as it does for Stevens.

It might seem odd, and deeply counterintuitive, to think of a work of literature in these terms. What might it mean to think of it as a form of resistance or a cancella-

tion of the "pressure of reality"? Scheduled flights and train journeys might get cancelled, but it seems hard to think about this as part of the inner working of a poem. And how might this, in turn, connect to more familiar ways of thinking about literature as a way of telling stories about reality, or, in a more expressive style of thought, the discovery of a writer's voice?

In Stevens's case, at least, the thought that a work of literature might cancel the pressure of reality is, in part, explained by the brief cultural history of the imagination that he provides in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words." Attempting to imagine a "possible poet" – a poet, for example, who might live in the United States in the middle of the twentieth century – he thinks of a special kind of historical awareness:

> He [the possible poet] will have thought that Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton placed themselves in remote lands and in remote ages; that their men and women were the dead – and not the dead lying in the earth, but the dead still living in their remote lands and in their remote ages, and living in the earth or under it, or in the heavens – and he will wonder at those huge imaginations, in which what is remote becomes near, and what is dead lives with an intensity beyond any experience of life. (262)

While this passage might illustrate an anxiety about belatedness, a sense that the modern writer lives in the shadow of the "huge imaginations" of an earlier epoch, Stevens also gives the passage another inflection and another kind of contrast. If the great writers of the past had the capacity to bring close to us what was remote in time and space – as the seventeenth-century poet Milton does, for example, when, taking the biblical story of the world's creation as his subject, he imagines in Book 2 of *Paradise Lost* the "Sail-broad Vannes" of Satan as he prepares for take-off in the flight from Hell to the newly created earth – the modern writer does something like the opposite. An imaginative work that makes what is remote in time and space at once intimate and alive is replaced by a form of what Stevens calls "abstraction" and this works by making what is close and familiar appear remote and strange. This is the technique that allows the imagination to push back at what presses upon it. It creates the possibility of what Stevens calls "contemplation," the state of mind that is excluded, as he makes clear earlier in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," by the "pressure of reality."

The first two stanzas of Stevens's poem "Fabliau of Florida" (*Collected Poems*, 23) provides a brief epitome of where the kind of creative resistance he has in mind can lead:

> Barque of phosphor
> On the palmy beach,
>
> Move outward into heaven,
> Into the alabasters
> And night blues.

The scene is familiar enough. It might be on a postcard: a Florida beach on a moonlit night with the sea stretching away. But the poem itself is not a description of a beach or a picture of it in the way a postcard is. The initial scene is transformed by a language that rhythmically and semantically is full of light and air, including the lightness that is given by the exuberant fictive invention of the "barque of phosphor," wave light imagined not just as a boat but a "barque," a word that brings into the poem its resonance of other languages – French, Italian and Latin – and other legendary and fabulous scenes. The phrase is an example of Stevens's belief that "Poetry is a revelation in words by means of words." The pressure of reality is resisted by tuning words to a new pitch, giving them a new sound, turning them away from their customary uses. The alleviation may be brief as the disenchanted tone of the poem's ending indicates (23):

> There will never be an end
> To this droning of the surf

After the dream of the "barque of phosphor," "the alabasters/ And night blues" comes the real monotonous sound of the waves falling on the shore. Stevens, in this poem, acknowledges but does not succumb to this kind of disenchantment. The "droning of the surf" is as much a part of the "revelation in words by means of words" as the "barque of phosphor." The one does not simply cancel or undermine the other.

Enzensberger's ideal poem becomes political by resisting politics. For Stevens politics is a salient part of the "pressure of reality" which his ideal poem must resist in order to free the mind for contemplation. Both are versions of an idea about the literary work that can take on different resonances. One of the last lines of T.S. Eliot's poem *The* Waste Land – "These fragments I shore against my ruins" – reflects, among other things, an important part of the method of his poem, a collage of quotations from older texts, indicating that it too is engaged in an act of resistance, building a defense work against "ruins" that are both psychological and cultural. Nervous breakdown is what the work must keep at bay, but nervous breakdown is itself a symptom of a much wider social malaise. A similar motif is at work in the novels of Virginia Woolf and Thomas Mann, two of Eliot's contemporaries.

This raises a further question about what, if anything, is protected by the resisting imagination. Sanity certainly seems one answer: In Stevens's case it is the possibility of contemplation. In Enzensberger it is the possibility of practicing an art free from domination. In none of these cases are we given simple guides as to how these possibilities could be achieved. In the one case it can mean writing a poem like "Fabliau of Florida"; in the other, while being wary of sermonizing definitions on the subject, Enzensberger offers some speculative conditions. Some of these have to do with refusal, but there is a supplement to this that turns on a special kind of witnessing. Immediately after his statement about poetry's unpolitical politics, Enzensberger adds that poetry should "continue to speak for everyone about things of which no one speaks, of a tree, a stone, of that which does not exist." There is a parallel emphasis in Stevens,

but in his case what needs to be retrieved from "its obscure existence" is nobility. "Its voice," he writes, "is one of the inarticulate voices which it is their [poets'] business to overhear and record" ("The Noble Rider," 267).

We might overeagerly want to conflate these two remarks and find in them evidence of another, affirmative relation between literature and politics. There seems to be an echo and an overlap between some speculative assertions about how poems might work and one kind of understanding of what politicians do. There is a claim to speak on behalf of someone or something. There is a sense of constituencies that are despised or inarticulate and need to be heard. The writer like the politician is a representative. In Enzensberger's case we might hear in the claim that the poem speaks "for everyone" one of the least trustworthy forms of political speech, that moment when a politician asserts that he or she speaks for some large collective, the "nation," or "all right-thinking people," or "Britain's hardworking families." Hearing "inarticulate voices" has become the proclaimed task of any number of modern politicians, notably in that suspect claim to speak on behalf of a "silent majority."

These coincidences of language are both tempting and misleading. They are tempting because they seem to point to an answer as to how literature might work politically, by speaking for all those constituencies that are ignored or misrepresented by political establishments. In speaking for these constituencies the writer also bears witness for them. Literature pleads the cases of those who lack the means to bring their grievances to a place where some justice might be done. If anywhere, we find here the affirmative political role that literature might play: speaking up for those who either don't have voices in any ordinary sense – a "tree," a "stone"– or who have voices that are not heard.

Yet if we think of the writer as performing this political task, we need to be cautious in understanding how exactly it is political at all. We return to that strange ambiguous border where writing becomes political by refusing to be so. The conditions that enable Enzensberger and Stevens to write about "speaking on behalf of" or "for everyone" or overhearing "inarticulate voices" are those of literary form not of legislative assemblies. Literature makes no laws. It cannot coerce anybody to behave in one way rather than another. Writers cannot claim to be representative on the basis of winning more votes in an election than their rivals, or, if they do, they do so as politicians rather than writers. Talk of writers representing constituencies can be equally misleading if we think of the latter as defined by place or political affiliation or specific interests or an entitlement to vote. There is a continuing danger here that readers as well as critics will expect writers to "represent" in a way that politicians do or should do.

With these reservations in place, what then might be the political content of claims made on behalf of poetry to overhear the inarticulate or to speak on behalf of the overlooked and ignored "for everyone"? It is worth noting the basic metaphor for writing at work in the essays by Enzensberger and Stevens, one that works alongside the thought that the act of imagination is also an act of resistance. It is conceived, whether deliberately or not, in terms of a process of speaking and listening, and,

hence, of the different properties of voice, articulate or inarticulate, loud or soft, heard or overheard. Writing thought of this way becomes a medium for channeling voices, including, paradoxically, the voices of things like stones or trees or the future that are not ordinarily thought of as having voices at all. From a rhetorical perspective, the basic trope of writing thought of this way is not metaphor or mimesis, but personification or prosopopoeia. In a dictionary definition of the trope the writer speaks "as another person or object." The etymology of the Greek term *prosopopoeia* combines the word for face, *prosopon*, with the word for make or do, *poien*. It reminds us that the rhetorical term probably had its origins in drama, in an actor speaking a part, and adopting a mask to do so. The voices that speak through the mask can come from many sources: gods, animals, stones, trees, from the dead as well as the living. They can fade in and out of hearing or seem obstinately to refuse to speak. In "Fabliau of Florida," Stevens creates a voice that addresses the sea by way of the "barque of phosphor" and then gets the sea's equivocal reply. It is a fiction, of course. But the poem's existence is a kind of fact about the way that literature imagines voices where we might think none are to be found. Once found, they can have an effect that cannot be dismissed as "merely" fictional.[7]

There are political implications to thinking about writing in this way. Some of them are far-reaching; others of a more immediate and local application. If literature is a form of ventriloquism, so too are religion, politics, and those diverse forms of communicating that we call media. Historically, literature has been shaped by its rivalries and collaborations with, and its subordination to, these various powers for the channeling of voices. More immediately, in the context of the resisting imagination, there are a number of different connections to be made between what literature can give voice to and the power of politics. One of them is reparative. Literature gives a voice to those whom political power has trampled upon, destroyed and silenced. It communes with this multitude and imagines their speech. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is a work of this kind, as is, more recently, the Chinese author Yang Lianke's novel *The Dream of Deng Village*. Allied to this are works that deal with living in the aftermath of political catastrophe: W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*, for example, or Vasily Grossman's *Everything Flows*. In all these works the voices of the dead and the living and the half-alive mix and mingle. Another and different kind of connection is provided by satire. Here literature's power to simulate voices is used to mock the pretensions of political speech and imagine ways of enduring or avoiding political authority: Jaroslav Hašek's *The Good Soldier Švejk* is a work of this kind, as is its successor, Joseph Heller's *Catch 22*. Enzensberger's reference to poetry's capacity to give voice to "that which does not exist" suggests another connection by way of analogy to fictions about the future whether they are dystopian or utopian, one kind indicating the deathly consequences that a prevailing political system might have, as in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaiden's Tale*; the other encouraging an education in the desire for a different and better future, as in William Morris's *News from Nowhere*.

These connections and the works chosen to illustrate them can only be minimally indicative. What each points to is the potential for political significance in literature's

powers of ventriloquism. There is of course nothing inevitable about this. Giving voice to fictions is not something that automatically resists political domination. Literature is quite as likely to go with the grain of an unjust society as to challenge it. But the potential remains and is, in some cases, realized in ways that remind us of the cogency of Enzensberger's arguments about how poetry can become political by resisting politics.

Enzensberger's formula for the ideal poem contains one further dimension of voice that may seem both controversial and politically dubious. In speaking of things that no one speaks about, the poem, as has already been noted, also speaks "for everyone." It seems hard to imagine any kind of speech, inside or outside a poem, of which this might seem to be true. It also appears to lay claim to a universality of utterance which can only founder on the knowledge that poems and poets, like all literary forms and their authors, are defined by specific cultural circumstances whether of class, gender, ethnicity, or history that make their claim to be representative voices inevitably partial and limited. Enzensberger's own critical and historical understanding would make him aware of these limitations. The puzzle, then, is that he still makes the claim, the claim that a poem can speak "for everyone." What possible basis could it have?

One response to the question is to say that the poem itself has become a utopian artifact. Like other utopias, it speaks of a possibility for experience, not about proven facts. The subject-matter of the poem may not be utopian in any obvious sense, but there is – or so at least Enzensberger wants to persuade us – a possibility in the poem's form that it might come to speak for everyone. The nature of this possibility can be better understood when Enzensberger's essay is connected to another that it was almost certainly in dialogue with at the time it was first written. In 1957, the German philosopher and composer Theodor Adorno had published an essay called "On Lyric Poetry and Society." The historical span of the essay is from the late eighteenth century to what was for Adorno a mid twentieth-century present. Although it doesn't explicitly take up this theme, like other work of Adorno's during the postwar period, it is preoccupied with what possibilities there are for art and literature after the political and existential catastrophe of the Holocaust.

Adorno is another thinker for whom the idea of resistance is integral to his conception of the poem. As with Enzensberger and Stevens, this is a matter of a dynamic of form, not the choice of a political content. Noting the ethereal or spiritual quality of lyric, and the implications of lyric voice, Adorno argues that this has to be understood dialectically: "It implies a protest against a social situation that every individual experiences as hostile, alien, cold, oppressive and this situation is imprinted in reverse on the poetic work" (344–345). Each work is like a page, whose other side consists of a situation that work is trying to overcome. For Adorno, the success of this lyric "protest" is that it should speak on behalf of "every individual." Success is by no means guaranteed. The risk that lyric poetry runs is that its highly individual form of expression will be no more than that. It will become what is often called "merely subjective." Against this Adorno asserts another possibility: "The universality of lyric's substance

is social in nature. Only one who hears the voice of humankind in the poem's solitude can understand what the poem is saying" (343).

The auditory imagination and the idea of prosopopoeia is again strongly at work in these sentences. Hearing, not reading or deciphering, is an essential condition of poetic understanding. The identity of the "one who hears" is ambiguous: possibly the maker of the work, possibly its audience. The ambiguity is telling. "Universality" is not a property that the writer can command. It is a potential in the work and one that will be realized both as a crucial and risky moment in its composition, and in the possibility that it will be heard in a certain way, not because the work reflects "my voice" or the "voice of the writer," but something different again, "the voice of humankind."

The idea that some literary works are forms of both resistance and witness has at least one further bearing that disturbs categories of both ethical and political judgment. "If This Is a Man" by Primo Levi, first published in 1958, is a work of this kind. Described by the critic Karl Miller as an author "who has spoken to many people, and on their behalf," Levi's book provides a careful and measured account of life and death during the 20 months he spent living in Auschwitz (Levi xxv). The fact that the book exists at all is a mark of its resistance to the annihilating logic of one totalitarian ideology. In its seventh chapter, called "A Good Day," Levi writes about his and his fellow inmates' experiences on a day when the sun becomes noticeably warmer and certain recognitions become possible: "the meadows are green; because, without a sun, a meadow is as if it were not green" (83). No longer dominated by cold, the inmates become aware of how hungry they are:

> For human nature is such that grief and pain – even simultaneously suffered – do not add up as a whole in our consciousness, but hide, the lesser behind the greater, according to a definite law of perspective. It is providential and is our means of surviving in the camp. (85).

Hit by hunger, Levi has fantasies of food as do others in his work team. Then by a stroke of luck and cunning, they discover "ninety pints" of uneaten soup. They eat it hurriedly, on the move, like animals, but the result by the evening is that they are neither cold nor hungry:

> as we are all satiated, at least for a few hours, no quarrels arise, we feel good, the Kapo feels no urge to hit us, and we are able to think of our mothers and wives which usually does not happen. For a few hours we can be unhappy in the manner of free men. (89)

The last sentence of the chapter takes up an earlier reflection that builds on Levi's thought about the layered and perspectival character of grief and pain and, hence, how the relief of one kind of pain brings another previously masked by it. This, Levi writes, "is the reason why so often in free life one hears that man is never content"

(85). The deprivations of the camp are so extreme that this state is not possible because the very idea of being contented and discontented has disappeared. When they miss their mothers and wives it is this aspect of freedom that Levi and his companions find briefly restored.

What Levi witnesses, what he tells, is at once very straightforward and also disturbing: "A Good Day" is about how for a short time human life can flourish in the midst of a death camp. Nothing is justified by this, but what is told is very close to what Hannah Arendt writes about when she thinks of the resistance to totalitarianism that resides in the "great capacity of men to start something new." The something new that starts again in "A Good Day" is a human experience of life. What that experience is cannot be fully grasped by the methods of critique, argumentation, or rational analysis. It falls outside what are often taken to be the modes of political discourse. Only the movement between narration and reflection, what, from another perspective, we might think of as Levi's great skill as a writer, enables this kind of witnessing. What is striking too is that, although Jewish, Levi does not deliberately and self-consciously write "as a Jew." Instead he writes on behalf of and toward what he understands to be human nature.

A recent article on the website of the British newspaper, the *Guardian*, offered a response to failures in the current banking system by proposing that the political state should be more actively involved in directing investment toward industry and enterprise. It provoked a long thread of supportive, critical, and abusive contributions. One of these found something distinctively anachronistic in the idea that a nation-state take on this responsibility and associated it with communism : "Communism," he or she remarked, "is so twentieth century." And, of course, we may think the same thing about all these thoughts of Arendt and Adorno, Enzensberger, Stevens and Orwell. They are "so twentieth century." Politics is not dominated by the threat of totalitarianism any more. Writing no longer has to begin in resistance to a pervasive violence. The early twenty-first century world is lighter, faster, becoming more peaceful and less prone to imagine the relation between literature and politics in terms of the antagonism between the sinister powers of the state and the writer's heroic commitment to freedom. The literary politics of today is not about resistance but about finding the right niche in the ever expanding, ever changing world of literary circulation. In so far as this is political at all – concerned that is with questions of justice and equality – the significant problems lie elsewhere: the sway of one language over another; access to publication and to those metropolitan centers that the French critic Pascal Casanova has described as "consecrating authorities" at work in an international literary space with its complex rules and procedures; the existence of unacknowledged but still profound ethnic, gender, and class prejudices among the gatekeepers and guardians of literary reputation (Casanova 12). If there is a politics to creative writing it is here that it is to be found in questions of access to the global literary marketplace.

In 2001 the Indian writer Arundhati Roy published an essay "The Ladies Have Feelings . . . So Shall We Leave It to the Experts?" that reflects, and reflects on, some

of these changes. Roy seems to start from a different set of assumptions from Adorno, Enzensberger, and Stevens: the free speech of writers is guarded by powerful states and civil societies to an unprecedented degree; an active and expanding literary market is hungry for new trends, including, as she ironically remarks a trend called "Indian writing"; the award of prestigious literary prizes has turned writers into celebrities, wanted not so much for their work as their presence and the curiosity it provokes about what writers do with their lives. All these changes are informed by another that is, of course emphatically political: the emergence of "postcolonial" nations and the question this raises about their relation to the established political powers of the West. But this is a different context from the concerns about totalitarianism or the violent pressures of modernity that haunted writers in the twentieth century.

But, as the essay develops, it turns out that the old ghosts have not been laid to rest. They have taken on new forms. Like Enzensberger, Roy is preoccupied with the question of the writer's obligations to something other than celebrity and success:

> A good or a great writer may refuse to accept any responsibility or morality that society wishes to impose on her. Yet the best and the greatest of them know that if they abuse this hard won freedom, it can only lead to bad art. There is an intricate web of morality, rigour and responsibility that art, that writing itself, imposes on a writer. (Roy 5)

The phrasing is different, but the basic argument is almost exactly the same: the freedom to practice an art carries with it the responsibilities that are intrinsic to, in this case, the practice of writing. The quality of a work is not something simply decided by others, whether critics or readers or publicity machines, but is a part of the writer's dedication. The nature of this difference between good and bad art may be hard to articulate, and, when articulated, may be disputed. But, for Roy, at least it is intrinsic to the process of composition and indisputable. It is a quality in the relation between a writer and her medium; it is imagined as a "line" between good and bad art that "once you learn to recognize . . . it's impossible to ignore"; and, again, like Enzensberger, it has to do with a condition of the imagination, a kind of seeing:

> In the midst of a bloody military coup, for instance, you could find yourself fascinated by the mating rituals of a purple sunbird, or the secret life of a captive goldfish, or an old aunt's descent into madness. . . . Or, on the contrary, in the midst of putative peace, you could like me be unfortunate enough to stumble on a silent war. The trouble is that once you see it you can't unsee it. And once you've seen it, keeping quiet, saying nothing becomes as political an act as speaking out. (Roy 6–7)

The "silent war" is the new form of monstrous politics, not in this case the totalitarianism that so preoccupied Arendt, Enzensberger, Orwell, and Adorno, but what we uneasily or glibly call "globalization." For Roy, it is the new form of empire and one that wreaks havoc on the lives of the Indian poor. The requirements of the resisting

imagination and the imperatives of speaking and listening that go with it have not, at least for some, gone away.

NOTES

1 In *Poetic Justice*, Martha Nussbaum has argued a similar case for the public value of literature in modern democratic societies.

2 Nigel Smith's recent edition of Marvell's poems gives more information about these ambivalent responses to the poem (Marvell).

3 In *Writing Degree Zero*, Roland Barthes provides a brilliant account of the resistance to ideology in this kind of minimalist style..

4 In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault provides a parallel account to Orwell's of the power of surveillance.

5 An accessible source for Brecht's thinking about theater and politics is his *Messingkauf Dialogues*.

6 In *Literature and the Gods*, Roberto Calasso has discussed the nineteenth-century revolt against the "religion of society" among some European writers such as de Lautréamont and Mallarmé.

7 In *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, Paul de Man has an illuminating discussion of prosopopoeia in the work of Wordsworth and Shelley. In *Poetry after Auschwitz*, Susan Gubar has identified a fundamental role for the form in work written about the Shoah.

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25

Creative Writing and the Cold War University

Eric Bennett

Treating institutionalized creative writing without reference to the aftershocks of fascism and the ideological struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union that emerged after World War II is sort of like discussing the Apollo program as pure science. The international shift in economic and political power beginning in 1945, the material and spiritual carnage of the war, and the global contest it gave rise to profoundly shaped the academic discipline of creative writing. The graduate programs emerged as part of the boom in American colleges and universities during the Cold War, and invoking the Cold War gives us not only a date of birth but a context of huge political, aesthetic, and philosophical significance. Our practices in the classroom today derive strangely but unmistakably from the historical moment in which they were born – a fact crucial to thinking about the present and future of the discipline.

In 1940, the nascent Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa stood alone. By 1950, four programs had joined it, those at Johns Hopkins (in 1946), Stanford (in 1947), the University of Denver (in 1947), and Cornell (in 1948). Until the 1960s, these five were the big players, although after the war writers increasingly found positions in English departments as the curriculum expanded. In the 1960s, with the matriculation of the Baby Boom generation, many new creative writing programs were founded, and by 1970 they numbered close to 50. They continued to proliferate at an astonishing rate through to the twenty-first century.[1]

The second round of programs, founded during the 1960s, derived from the first. The alumni of the original programs sought employment like that of their teachers,

while expanding institutions of higher education, inspired by the success of Iowa, sought teacher-writers to oversee the formation of new departments. At least half of the nearly 50 new graduate programs founded in the 1960s were founded by Iowa alumni (Myers 165).

This meant the replication of pedagogical conventions, including the workshop method, a story almost too familiar. A story less familiar, and in fact all but forgotten, is how the original workshops, with large and long-term repercussions, defined and constricted the literary or poetic conventions of the discipline. The workshops of the late 1940s and 1950s enshrined a specific, powerful, limiting view of literature. Broadly, the view reflected the modernist tendencies in favor at the moment – more narrowly, the fears and hopes of 1945. M.F.A. programs ever since have spread that view. To many, the outlook appears roughly transcendent. But it can be assumed that, like all such outlooks, it won't appear transcendent forever. The dramatists of the Elizabethan stage, the neoclassicist theorists of the eighteenth century, and the poets of the Romantic period, to name a few, thought that they, too, were making literature as it simply had to be made.

During the Cold War, creative writers at colleges and universities privileged the particular over the universal, the sensory over the ideational, the concrete over the abstract, the situated over the synoptic, and the personal and the individual over the communal and the collective. It was a preference that blended seamlessly the aesthetic with the political. It was the belletristic imperative of an anti-Communist decade. Some writers with academic posts advanced the imperative with intense self-consciousness; others followed the herd.

Before the literary-philosophical story, let's look at the financial one. In 2013, when those wishing to be read outnumber those wishing to read them, the initial years of the M.F.A. movement boggle the mind. In 1945, the prime financial impetus for institutionalized creative writing came neither from students longing to versify nor from established versifiers yearning to make rent. It came from a powerful organization that desired to reshape American culture as part of a new global order in which the United States was supreme. This was the Rockefeller Foundation, and to understand it one must first understand the climate in which it operated.

Higher education changed radically between the Great Depression and the 1960s. American participation in World War II led to an unprecedented partnership between the government and the science faculties at research universities, and the ensuing arms race with the Soviets perpetuated this tie.[2] The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, or G.I. Bill, was also pivotal. It sent millions of veterans to college and graduate school throughout the late 1940s and 1950s, adding in bodies what the Pentagon added in grants and contracts. After the Soviets launched the first Sputnik into space in 1957, Congress passed the National Defense Education Act, which funded math and science education at all levels, redoubling the boom. The head-count of students in college in 1960 was 3.2 million, about triple what it had been in 1930. With the admission of women and minorities during the 1960s and with the arrival on campus of the Baby Boom generation, the total number of students

more than doubled again by the beginning of the 1970s, exceeding 7 million (see Kerr ch. 6).

The sciences benefited the most from the boom, but the humanities thrived too. Somebody had to teach composition to engineers in training. And the prosperity of the liberal arts went far beyond that: it reflected a massive postwar commitment to humanistic studies advocated by educators and embraced by veteran students. Beneficiaries of the G.I. Bill tended to be older, more experienced, and less prepared academically than their younger peers, and many of them longed to explore life's big questions in the classroom. They were as likely to study history or English as anything else.[3] With Ernest Hemingway at the height of his fame, soldier students gravitated to creative writing classes to transform combat experiences into literature, often with his particular example in mind.[4]

The novelist Vance Bourjaily, acclaimed in his day for *The End of My Life* (1947) – which reads now like a Hemingway parody – was a World War II veteran and mainstay on the faculty at Iowa starting in the 1950s. Marguerite Young, reminiscing about her experiences teaching at Iowa in his day, recalled "two teachers who shared the fiction seminar, both ex-Marines and with a very hard-boiled approach to literature. They encouraged bad imitations of Hemingway" (Ruas 113). But in his later years Wallace Stegner, who founded the writing program at Stanford, often waxed nostalgic about the soldier students of the 1940s, seeming to doubt that things would ever be so good again. His alumni included Eugene Burdick, future co-author of *The Ugly American* and *Fail-Safe*, and Evan S. Connell, who later wrote *Mrs. Bridge* and *Son of the Morning Star*. The novelist Walter Havighurst, who ran courses in creative writing at the University of Miami, Ohio, loved the G.I. Bill generation so much so that he declined a writing fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation in order to stay in the classroom.[5]

Federal dollars transformed the colleges and universities, but private money played as large a role, especially in the humanities. After Congress created in the 1930s, in response to the Great Depression, a progressive tax scheme and set high rates on the profits of large businesses, many corporations opted to retain control over their profits by establishing charitable foundations.[6] Along with the Carnegie and the Ford foundations, the Rockefeller Foundation, to which I now return, was at the apex of this historically unprecedented, publicly oriented disbursement of corporate wealth. From the mid-1940s through the 1960s, it underwrote new academic programs across many fields of knowledge and sponsored initiatives that transformed existing ones. The philanthropic face of Standard Oil, in other words, remade ostensibly autonomous institutions from the outside.

The Foundation's Humanities Division believed that the United States lacked a sufficient awareness of other nations, peoples, and languages and had yet fully to develop a degree of culture and a clear set of values commensurate with its military superiority and new global role. The division was directed from 1932 to 1949 by David H. Stevens, an English professor from the University of Chicago, who devoted long hours and large grants to redefining the nature of literary studies in the US. The

goal was to raise the level of cultural literacy inside and outside of the academy and to make English departments more belletristic and more concerned with "values." Such a focus might, in the view of the Foundation, help to avert a third world war and preserve the global stability on which markets depended. Stevens and his Division were especially interested in the role of the writer in society.

In 1945 they attempted to seed the Midwest with creative writing programs. This was a time when, with the exception of Iowa – which was not yet "Iowa" – there were no such things. The Foundation sponsored Havighurst (at Miami) to chair a committee to advocate the establishment of the presence of writers on campuses across the region. Havighurst consulted with Paul Engle and Wilber Schramm at Iowa, Robert Penn Warren and Tremaine McDowell of the University of Minnesota, Harlan Hatcher of Ohio State University, Allan Seager of the University of Michigan, and Warren Beck of Lawrence College, and drew up plans for conferences, writing fellowships, and salaries for teacher-writers. English departments, like it or not, would share their discipline with living practitioners.

The Havighurst committee failed to produce an elegant plan, and the initial effort collapsed in 1946. But in the years to come the Foundation changed tactics, not aims, and underwrote creative writing on a much grander scale, starting in 1953, giving a three-year grant of $40,000 to the Iowa Writers' Workshop. It was a vast sum at the time – enough to support a score of writers and to begin to transform Iowa into the national bellwether that it soon became.

In retrospect, we tend to think of literary activity in terms of today's categories: M.F.A. programs, English departments, commercial publishing, and literary journalism. But Stevens and others wanted to foster a single national literary scene comprising all four. The Iowa grant was but one prong in a five-pronged plan to change the culture. The other four were the *Kenyon*, *Sewanee*, *Partisan*, and *Hudson* reviews. Through the editorial boards of the reviews and through the administration at Iowa, the Foundation identified writers worth sponsoring. They effectively outsourced the evaluation of talent, trusting figures such as John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and Paul Engle to decide who deserved funding. Through them, the Humanities Division formed a relationship with Flannery O'Connor, the one writer who received checks directly from the Foundation instead of through a university or a review.[7]

Language from the Rockefeller Foundation Annual Report from 1945 captures the vision behind the giving. "The most serious destruction" caused by World War II, Raymond B. Fosdick wrote in the president's review, "has not been that of wealth . . . The really significant destruction has been in social and intellectual organization, and in the faiths and codes of men" (Rockefeller Foundation 19–20). In 1945 alone, the Foundation had given over a million dollars to programs in the humanities for the exploration and the fortification of those "faiths and codes," and the expenditures increased in the next decade. The investments were made always with an eye to the wider world. Stevens, reflecting in 1953 on the initiatives, insisted that "all humanistic research and teaching must be international. There is no nationalism in learning

or in the arts" (vii). Stevens shared the internationalist spirit in which many sought peace and stability. The outlook, then as now, belonged to the political center and left. Right-wing congressional demagogues railed against internationalist language and the prospect of internationally constituted sovereignty as, to their ears, it smacked of Bolshevism. In the early 1950s the Republican representatives Eugene Cox of Georgia and Brazilla Carroll Reece of Tennessee each commissioned an investigation of the Ford Foundation for possible subversive activity. But even as McCarthy fumed and John Foster Dulles rattled atomic sabers at the Soviet Union, the United States Information Service and the Central Intelligence Agency were culturally courting intellectuals around the globe. Like the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation effectively became in the 1950s a privatized arm of the State Department, sponsoring programs abroad that elevated arts and sciences as a universal language, putatively above and beyond politics.

The Rockefeller Foundation directly sponsored the internationalist activities of the two most influential founding figures in the history of writing programs, Wallace Stegner and Paul Engle. In the early 1950s it sent Stegner to Asia to speak on behalf of liberal values and individualistic self-expression and to foster international literary exchange. From lecterns in Japan, Stegner touted the qualities of those modernist and contemporary texts that American English departments were finally admitting to the canon. The Foundation also underwrote the *Pacific Spectator*, published out of Stanford under Stegner's supervision, as a journal where the literature of the American West and the Far East mingled.

Stegner's internationalist commitments and ties to the Rockefeller Foundation, at their most profound, were superficial compared to Paul Engle's. As an influential director of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, Engle has received credit for his domestic accomplishments (Kurt Vonnegut claimed he did more than anybody else in history to help writers), but those accomplishments – transforming Iowa into "Iowa" – had an internationalist backbone. For three decades, Engle aggressively promoted the writer at the university as a symbol of liberal, democratic, capitalist free expression at home and abroad.[8]

Engle used his regional connections (he was born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa), his network as a former Rhodes Scholar, and the momentum of his early fame as a patriotic poet to make the Iowa Writers' Workshop a national landmark. He attracted the sponsorship of scores of Midwestern businessmen and small corporations. He did so with fundraising pitches that invoked the threat of Communism and described how creative writing programs created for artists a politically hygienic refuge from bohemia – from the ideologically suspect urban centers where the literati, at least until 1939, had mingled with Communists and shared the spirit of the Popular Front. After the war, full of Hemingway-bedazzled veterans, the Workshop cleansed the writing life of the taint of pink or red affiliations.[9]

In the 1950s Engle started recruiting writers from abroad – from places where the Soviets and the Americans were vying for allegiances: Japan, the Philippines, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe. Honored by fellowships and surrounded by serious

colleagues in the American heartland, the recruits would, Engle believed, return home committed to the United States. After a decade and a half of this, in 1967, Engle founded with the Chinese novelist Nieh Hualing (who became his second wife) the International Writing Program at Iowa. It received from the government both visible and invisible support – from the State Department and the CIA. Later Engle described the program as a spontaneous creation of the mid-1960s, a new innovation following the success of the domestic Writers' Workshop. But in fact the international program merely continued and purified the financial and ideological dynamic of the Writers' Workshop of the 1950s.

During and after the McCarthy era the stridently anti-Communist Midwestern newspaper mogul Gardner Cowles, Jr lavished attention on the program, providing Engle with clippings that made it all the easier to raise funds from local businesses. Henry Luce repeatedly gave Iowa a national profile on the pages of *Time* and *Life*, providing the best clippings of all. Publicity attracted funding, funding generated publicity, and Iowa – meaning Engle – cornered in the 1950s the market on literary prestige. Typical was Engle's service as the series editor for the O. Henry prize collection from 1954 to 1959. Many writers he included in the collection had Iowa affiliations. These he would tout in fundraising letters and interviews, underscoring the extraordinary number of prize-winning authors Iowa had produced. He also tended to blur the distinction between prize-winning authors that Iowa hired and the ones that it graduated. Iowa spontaneously oozed with prizes, it seemed.

In 1945, the Rockefeller Foundation, through the Havighurst initiative, had schooled Engle in the power that lay in the nexus of Cold War values, postwar philanthropic abundance, and high hopes for literature. In 1953 it had transformed Iowa by vastly increasing the budget. In the 1950s it sponsored foreign writers who came to the US, often under Engle's wing. And in 1963 it paid for Engle's months of travel in Asia, where he scouted talent among politically uncommitted intellectuals in the capitals of the East.

In the 1960s, as the second wave of creative writing programs began, Iowa proved pivotal in at least two ways: it presented other colleges and universities with an image of a successful university writing program; and it produced M.F.A. recipients eager to found new programs. The spectacle was grand, yet the grounds of its grandeur were unrepeatable. The air of unfulfilled or disappointed expectations that surrounded many later creative writing programs derives in part from the difference between a bellwether program with massive extra-institutional support, on the one hand, and imitators funded by tuition dollars or university endowments, on the other. The imperial phase, during which somebody beyond the writer wanted the writer to write, still informs the discipline's self-conception. We dream of being needed. In reality, the lavish imperial phase was ending as the Vietnam War began.

So the exigencies of the Cold War determined a lot about the resources and administrative vision of the early programs. What about poetics – the view of literature that Stanford and Iowa established? This is the question whose answer has real implications for the writing programs of the twenty-first century.

If there is a reigning literary ideology today, it is not that fiction and poetry are advanced modes of synthetic or symbolic thought capable of capturing a transcendent spirit embodied in a nation or tribe. It is not that new stories, novels, and poems enter into a great tradition stretching back centuries and millennia. It is not that literature is eternal. It is that creative writing records the mind-boggling plurality of experiences that makes up the modern nation and globe. The discipline celebrates the cultural abundance of the present day. As an academic discipline, creative writing depends on and affirms difference in content. Everybody has a story to share, and the value of the story is its uniqueness.

In other words, the content of a story or poem does not constitute a moral good so much as the fact of the abundance of content across works by different authors. Tales of combat abide peaceably with stories of coming out abide peaceably with reminiscences of life in the barrio. This secular ecumenism would appear to be the new moral didacticism of literature. Despite what John Gardner argued in *On Moral Fiction* (1978), it's been a good 15 decades since we learned to be good (as the theory goes) by admiring virtuous characters. We act virtuously by beholding the plurality with an open mind. Tomorrow's plurality will replenish or even outstrip today's, and the things we write do not for that reason necessarily have to last very long.

The early years of creative writing, viewed in retrospect, present a picture both alien and integral to this ideology. In the 1950s, as English departments began to incorporate in the curricula both difficult modernist texts and older American ones, there emerged an institutional emphasis on personal experience. But this was at a time when the student body was far more homogeneous than it is now, and personal experience tended to mean the triumphs and tribulations of straight white Anglo-Saxon Protestant males. The individualism of the 1950s served not a national priority to embrace radical plurality – as emerged in the late 1960s and all the more in the 1970s – but a desire to eschew totalitarian ideologies by emphasizing individuals over groups, liberty over community. Engle and Stegner and their colleagues, shaken by the specter of Hitler and Stalin and Mussolini, believed that the individualistic strain in modernist literature could fortify young minds against sociological and demagogical abstractions. Creative writing programs would help to affirm the messy peopleness of people, their difference from each other, and the value of respecting such differences. As reflected in Engle's supportive letters to Gwendolyn Brooks in the 1940s and his mentorship of Margaret Walker, and in Stegner's progressive postwar journalism (see *One Nation*), the early creative writing pedagogues anticipated the cultural values of the 1960s; in fact, when the 1960s arrived, the programs, old and new, responded rapidly to the nationwide shift in campus sensibilities – even if men like Stegner were dismayed by the hippies. The workshops were an early site of the liberalizing of the academy. Yet we cannot let this obscure the fact that their literary-philosophical foundations were built in response to very different cultural circumstances.

Engle and Stegner and their colleagues at Iowa and Stanford tended to be writers and pedagogues, not ideologues. But they composed their fiction and poetry and

formulated their pedagogy in an atmosphere of thought distinct enough to summarize. I want to focus in particular on the criticism of John Crowe Ransom and Lionel Trilling, who towered over the intellectual scene in years after World War II, and who are representative.

Together Ransom and Trilling reflect the narrowing of the intellectual bandwidth in the 1940s and 1950s. They were improbable bedfellows: Ransom as an erstwhile Southern Agrarian, a chastened reactionary moving to the center from the right, and Trilling as a reformed Marxist, a chastened liberal moving to the center from the left. But it was exactly that improbability that was typical. Stalinism had wiped out American communism; Italian and German fascism had undermined Southern Agrarianism; and liberal democratic capitalism appeared to be the sole thin precarious path running between two very different kinds of totalitarian abyss. Trilling, Ransom, and those in their circles (often on the pages of journals funded by the Rockefeller Foundation) labored to broaden and fortify that thin path.

Ransom had laid the groundwork before the war. *The World's Body* (in 1938) articulated high hopes for literature amidst spirit-killing technologies and antihumanistic modes of thinking and being.[10] Ransom defined poetry as "the kind of knowledge by which we must know what we have arranged that we shall not know otherwise." He regarded science as a means to "know the world only as a scheme of abstract conveniences," and he put his stock not in these abstractions but in "the world which is made of whole and indefeasible objects . . . the world which poetry recovers for us" (xi). It was the duty of critics to distinguish between a poetry of things and a poetry of ideas and cast their lot with the former. We traditionally regard ideas as belonging to the realm of the spirit and things as things of mere matter. But Ransom flipped this Platonic intuition on its head. The imagist poets of the 1910s deserved praise for presenting "things in their thingness, or *Dinge* in their *Dinglichkeit*" (113). "What the public was inclined to seek in poetry" – meaning, the Edwardian public that the imagists rattled – "was ideas, whether large ones or small ones, grand ones or pretty ones, certainly ideas to live by and die by, but what the Imagists identified with the stuff of poetry was, simply, things" (113).

Ransom preferred images, which provided glimpses of "primordial freshness," to ideas or abstractions, which entailed the denaturing of nature, the streamlining of the phenomenological world. Ideas could not be divorced from modern scientific method. Abstraction allowed people to make instrumental use of particular objects and ignore their particularity. It facilitated violence and spiritual nihilism under the cover of good intentions. For him, this was what the American Civil War had been about: a culturally shallow North destroying a culturally profound South. He had not so much to say about chattel slavery. Ransom's poetic program grew out of his Agrarian one: in the 1920s he hoped that small farms would fortify the south against the denaturing onslaught of northern industrialization.

As the Agrarian vision lost viability – as the Depression killed the small southern farms and European fascism made arguments like this appear deeply ugly – Ransom looked to poetry to take the place of farms. Great poetry shared the desirable aspects

of the life of the gentleman farmer, being situated, organic, and irrationally permeated with meaningful rituals and customs. If you couldn't grow cotton, you could write like T.S. Eliot.

According to Ransom, the more tightly we take possession of the image, the more it withers into dead intellection. The difference between science and literature is value – is ethical or moral or spiritual quality – and it is precisely the job of science to squeeze value out of nature. The imagist poets, meanwhile, affirmed the particular, making difference, rather than similarity, the dominant priority in poetry. Ransom approved: "*Science*," he summarized, "*gratifies a rational or practical impulse and exhibits the minimum of perception. Art gratifies a perceptual impulse and exhibits the minimum of reason*" (130, italics in the original).

Ransom was contributing to the endgame of Romanticism. Writers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had elevated the singular, the personal, the anomalous, and the particular into a merit rivaling its opposite, the universal of neo-classical thought. The modernist avant-garde before World War I pushed this elevation further, placing the particular positively *above* the universal – but the avant-garde did so in relative obscurity. It took world events in combination with the great popularizers of the modernist ideas for the Romantic revolution to reach its endpoint. World War I had demonstrated the bankruptcy of Victorian abstractions and nineteenth-century nationalism, and modern artists were on hand and primed to say so. Ernest Hemingway's most famous passage from *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) voiced in fiction what Ransom would argue in criticism a decade later. Hemingway's Lieutenant Frederic Henry

> was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain . . . I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it . . . Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates. (184–185)

Twenty years after the Treaty of Versailles, World War II confirmed the modernist critique a second time, as if it needed confirming. The denatured truths of science, in service of an unquestioning attitude of instrumental application, produced Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The pure logic of bureaucratic rationalization, in service of a racist ideology, led to Auschwitz and Treblinka. The facile and charismatic propaganda of the Third Reich (which many intellectuals at the time feared to be formally indistinguishable from American movies and advertising) eroded the critical capacities of the mind. The historical materialism of Marxist thought, corrupted by Stalin, threatened to shroud the globe in a blanket of atheistic grayness. Common to all these dark turns in history were the velocity and efficacy with which humans could act in a world where abstractions reigned. They lost touch. Creative writing emerged as a means to regain touch, to eschew terroristically empty verities (e.g. "Arbeit macht

frei") and affirm, like Frederic Henry, the truth of roads and rivers and regiments and dates. "Write what you know," the saying goes.

If Ransom, retreating toward the political center from the right, helped to outline what would become the postwar vision for literature, Lionel Trilling, moving toward the center from the left, gave it its most mature and influential formulation in *The Liberal Imagination*, which collected his essays from the 1940s. Trilling, turning his back on Marx, looked to literature to generate the drag, the friction, that would decelerate the dehumanizing velocity of instrumental reason. "Some paradox of our natures leads us," he wrote, "when once we have made our fellow men the objects of our enlightened interest, to go on to make them the objects of our pity, then of our wisdom, ultimately of our coercion." Literature conceived as "moral realism," as "the product of the free play of the moral imagination," would "prevent this corruption" (222). It would slow things down, would show us in our human fullness, a fullness that contains irrationality, superstition and caste, but that does not move with the optimism so readily capable of shading into arrogant blindness.

Hemingway and Faulkner, in Trilling's view, got it right. They did not dramatize ideas but characters caught between ideas: the messiness of getting by. They were writers "intensely at work upon the recalcitrant stuff of life" who gave us "the sense that the amount and intensity of their activity are in a satisfying proportion to the recalcitrance of the material" (297). Life resisted programmatic formulation, and Faulkner and Hemingway captured this resistance.

Trilling was expressing the feelings of self-reproach he shared with many former Marxists in the late 1940s. He was writing literary criticism but also self-criticism. In 2013, the vast political faith he placed in fiction and poetry appears remarkable and strange. Trilling believed that literature laid bare human weakness and human possibility, their complexity and irrationality, and that this portrait might help save the world.

In such a spirit, Ransom, Trilling, and other postwar intellectuals formulated a kind of ethic of raw particularity. It united projects as unrelated as Hannah Arendt's critique of concentration camps with Wallace Stegner's maxims on fiction writing. It implored one to be suspicious of the habits of a mind not forever enmeshed in the irreducible, the here and now, the plainly human. The Cold War critics believed they were establishing a canon of American literature along such lines. They promoted the writers who fit (Henry James was another big one) and demoted James T. Farrell, Theodore Dreiser, John Dos Passos, and others whose fiction evinced too much of a collectivistic or deterministic theory of life.[11]

The ethic of raw particularity remains with the discipline of creative writing through to today. It has a power almost too great and too widespread even to be noticed. But it is clear where it came from. It dominated essays on creative writing starting in the 1940s, yet the ideological rationale for it, if ever clear, vanished from consciousness entirely by the 1960s. Contingent values became timeless doctrine.

Engle's own poetry embodies with remarkable literalness the prejudices of his time. In 1959 he published *Poems in Praise* celebrating American poets, war heroes, children, and love. He wrote that Robert Frost

> turns from Plato's pure ideal
> To drink the cold spring of the real,
> Proving by his devoted act
> Enchantment of the daily fact. (6)

And William Carlos Williams, according to Engle, captured things in their valuable thingness:

> No vagueness for him as a poet – always the bright
> particulars, as a doctor works with the definite
> fever, bone, fear. No universals for him apart
> from the precise thing – not the general color of red,
> but that exact geranium in its tin can, rusted and red. (15)

Poems in Praise included memorial sonnets "For the Iowa Dead," in which World War II is described as pitting those too wise for ideas against those swept away by them. "Not from an abstract sense of wrong and right" did the Americans leave their farms to fight, "But for the hill they fenced with aching arm . . ." (57). One sonnet can fairly be read as a paraphrase of *A Farewell to Arms*:

> Our words corrupt reality.
> The worn, quick syllable of *war*
> Proves no blood, terror, agony.
> The name of *sorrow* has no more
> Night-weeping anguish than the look
> Of petals dried in an old book. (69)

Reading Modern Poetry, a textbook coedited by Engle, included an interpretation of Archibald MacLeish's *Ars Poetica*, arguing that

> the *technique* of expressing significance in poetry demands sharp, specific *detail*. The concrete symbols, the things in the world as we know it – these are the invariable stuff of poetry, as, to the same extent, they need be of no other form of verbal communication. Poetry must operate through such concrete symbols. (Engle and Carrier 75)

This was the vision: a poetry of concrete symbols – of symbols so particular that they issue from and return to a single mind – and no longer of doves and roses and serpents, no longer the old public symbolism, but instead William Carlos Williams's red wheelbarrow glazed with rainwater beside the white chickens. Engle concentrated on particulars in his poetry, his teaching, and his occasional work as a critic and editor.

Stegner, leading the writing seminars in Palo Alto, also embraced the ethic. During his Asia trip it formed the heart of his lectures on American literature at Keio University in Tokyo. Stegner considered a writer "an incorrigible lover of concrete *things*" who makes his fictions from "such materials as the hard knotting of anger in the solar plexus, the hollowness of a night street, the sound of poplar leaves" (*Writer in America*, 7). Stegner defined the writer as "a vendor of the sensuous particulars of life, a perceiver and handler of things." He considered senses and memory to be the wellspring of literature; fully realized works consisted mostly of pictures. The writer "is not ordinarily or ideally a generalizer, not a dealer in concepts" (7). If ideas appeared in fiction, they ought to appear "as a ghost flits past an attic window after dark" (8).

Long after 1945, the turn against ideas permeated creative writing programs, determining the writing and teaching of those unaware of the genealogy of the conventions. Janet Burroway's influential textbook *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft* (1982) denounced a fiction of ideas, emphasizing the prime importance of sensory detail to fiction, insisting that "if a fiction writer sets out to write a story in order to illustrate an idea, the fiction will almost inevitably be thin" (311). Burroway argued that it's best to "begin with an image of a person or a situation that seems vaguely to embody something important, and you'll learn as you go what that something is" (311). Burroway defied her reader to write a story based on an idea, going so far as to include an exercise in wrong method. Write a story from a "political, religious, scientific, or moral idea," and see what happens. It is

> likely to produce a bad story. If it produces a bad story, it will be invaluably instructive to you, and you will be relieved of the onus of ever doing it again. If it produces a good story, then you have done something else, something more, and something more original than the assignment asks for. (381)

The conviction that creative writing should be purified of intellection is about as old and about as dubious as the imagist poetics that Ransom praised – in other words, about a century old. It has received tremendous momentum from institutions set up during the Cold War. And it fails to account for a whole lot of fiction and poetry. One can make a long list of great texts, from the medieval period to 2013, that would appear to draw on more than the five senses and disciplined language.

In her aversion to intellection, Burroway was far from alone in 1982, and since then countless authors and teachers have joined her. "Very few writers," Anne Lamott wrote cheerfully in 1994, "really know what they are doing until they've done it" (22). Stephen Koch recently urged that writers should not center their activity on thinking. "The intellect can *understand* a story – but only the imagination can *tell it*. Always prefer the concrete to the abstract. At this stage it is better to *see* the story, to *hear* and to *feel* it, than to think it" (35). Koch quotes John Braine, who suggests not to "think about the plot of the novel" but to "think about specific situations," aiming "at making pictures, not notes"; and he quotes Richard Bausch, whose imperative is: "Do not think. Dream."

The moral and intellectual thinness of the minimalist fiction of the late 1970s and 1980s – a product, largely, of writing workshops – has been attributed to many things: Vietnam-era collective malaise, a revolt against metafiction, feelings of competition with television, and so on.[12] Is it possible that that thinness reflects even more the literary values of writing workshops ideologically dedicated to solitary selves? Could it be that the repudiation of collectivist ideas, so powerful in the 1950s, has become an unwitting part of our legacy?

The more interesting question is why the ethic of raw particularity has endured so triumphantly so long after its initial moment. The ready transition from the ostensibly neutral (but actually white male) individualism of the 1950s to the diversities of race, class, and gender in the 1960s and after is perhaps *the* epic story in American intellectual history of the twentieth century. But is that explanation enough? One can plausibly speculate that a poetry of concrete symbols found a natural home in research universities because research universities encourage research. They encourage the discovery of the new, and they encourage the ever finer splitting of modern knowledge into narrow categories. Universities analyze better than they synthesize, and the old literature of synthesis – of overview and omniscience – finds a less comfortable home in them than the hyperparticularized fiction and poetry of personal experience. A program in which new students perennially bring their new concrete symbols and unprecedented particularity to the table can sustain itself with a clear sense of purpose year after year. It seems plausible that the perseverance of the conviction that ideas have little place in student writing arises from the requirements for institutionalizing the practice of writing.

It might also arise from the overabundance of writers teaching writing. People pass on wisdom almost before they've acquired it. A lucky turn in commercial publishing can qualify one for tenure-track employment. In many cases this brings to English departments the kind of freshness and relevance that the Rockefeller Foundation dreamed of in 1945. But it also inflates the value of a set of conventions for writing that can be mastered conceptually in a year – or even a week ahead of time by the teacher-writer working from Burroway or Koch or the like. Imagist poetics are easier to grasp than the broad currents of intellectual history and the role of literature within those currents. One's childhood is easier to dramatize than one's place in a complex globe.

In the university setting the heavy lifting of intellection mostly gets done in other departments: philosophers address ethical questions; political scientists do politics; sociologists tackle the nature of impersonal and environmental forces in the modern world; theologians cover religion; historians do history; and what is left most safely to the creative writing student is sensation alone: how things look, smell, feel, taste, and sound. The image, as Ransom defended it, prevails.

But might not creative writing programs do well to ask more of themselves? To compete with the philosophers, theologians, and historians by breaking down the boundaries that, in a professionalized postmodernity, only creative writers are allowed to break down? To start, instead of end, with the senses? Dante, Shakespeare, Milton,

George Eliot, Dostoevsky, Joyce, Tolstoy, and Woolf – to grab just a handful of names – were not afraid of overstepping any particular bounds.

American intellectuals during the Cold War made a universal value of attacking universal ideas. Critics in the 1940s and 1950s sanctified the expression of singular and private experience. Such expression, many believed, could help society to resist the sweeping destructive forces of machines and ideologies. Every student of poetry and of fiction would amplify the liberal democratic particularity of self, would render idiosyncrasy and difference as a testament to the pure value of individuality. The consensus culture of the 1950s has been read by many historians as a time of the repression of difference and the enforcement of homogeneity, and their arguments are convincing. But the 1950s were also the period when the theoretical frameworks of the 1960s were built – often quietly and out of widespread public view.[13]

Since the 1960s, the emphasis on particularity in the fiction and poetry of the workshops has taken two forms. These forms overlap chronologically, and both pertain, and are often blended in single works of fiction and poetry. But they can nevertheless be classified as the older and the newer emphases. The older is almost entirely formal or linguistic or theoretical – transcendent in its way: it is newness of perception. A protagonist or lyrical speaker notices the world with especial acuity: petals on a wet black bough. The newer emphasis, on the other hand, tends to be demographic, and it tightens the laces of the referential function of workshop writing. A writer comes from the Bronx or Bangladesh, from Haiti or Halifax, and speaks for his or her region.[14] The demographic pluralism takes the pressure off formal experimentation and allows for the standardization of form. Memoir replaces the novel. In both the old and the new modes of particularity, details matter more than generalities. But our preference for details of whatever kind, for particularities of perception or particularities of identity, should not be mistaken for wisdom for the ages. It is an aesthetic preference as historical as any other, and one with a dramatic but limited and limiting history.

Notes

1   See Myers, *The Elephants Teach* (1996, updated in 2006), which remains the most important work of scholarship on the history of creative writing. McGurl's *The Program Era*, the other major book in the field, establishes theoretical concepts that will be useful to scholars wishing to engage with American literature as a product of writing programs.

2   For a contemporary account see Kidd, *American Universities and Federal Research* (1959).

3   For at least 30 years, degrees in the humanities were highly valued by students and by the society that employed them upon graduation, at least to judge by the percentages. In 1970–1971, 7.6 percent of all bachelor's degrees awarded by American institutions were in English, outnumbered only by the combined fields of history and the social sciences. This reflected trends of long standing. In 2000–2001, when the absolute number of bachelor's degrees granted nationally had increased by 50 percent, degrees in English were down both absolutely and in proportion to the whole, coming in at 4 percent (Menand 145).

4   Regarding Hemingway's immense celebrity, see Raeburn, *Fame Became of Him*. I have written elsewhere about Hemingway's influence on creative writing programs: Bennett, "Ernest Hemingway."

5   This and other references to the Rockefeller Foundation summarize the contents of documents from the Rockefeller Archive Center, Tarrytown, New York.

6   Macdonald's contemporary account, *The Ford Foundation* – originally in the *New Yorker* – captures with his typically caustic exuberance the fantastic sums of money floating around in the 1950s. See also Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge*.

7   The story of the insurgency of the New Critics – largely bankrolled by the Foundation – has been told elsewhere. But the fact that the rise of Iowa is politically, philosophically, and financially closely tied to that insurgency has not received attention. Nor has the fact that the insurgency was *larger* than the New Criticism; that the New Criticism was a facet, not the whole. In-house Rockefeller Foundation memos describe the support of the four reviews and support of Iowa all as a single campaign to change literary culture in the US.

8   This portrait of Paul Engle and of the Iowa Writers' Workshop draws on documents from the Paul Engle Papers in the Special Collections Library at the University of Iowa, Iowa City, and also from the Rockefeller Archive Center.

9   Stegner, too, invoked the writing program as the safest place for artists in an era of anti-Communism: "The next important generation of writers is not in Bohemia, not in Greenwich Village, not in Paris, not in exile or in revolt, but in the colleges." See *The Writer in America*, 55.

10   The caricature of the New Criticism invoked ad nauseam in second-hand accounts of the history of literary studies suggests that the New Critics neglected everything outside the poem. Ransom's writings make clear that this was not so. Scholars have done smart readings of the politics of ostensibly apolitical approaches to literature. See esp. Walhout. Richard Ohmann's famous attack on the New Criticism in *English in America* was probably a necessary corrective, but reads now as shrilly polemical.

11   Regarding the influence of James on the workshops, see my article "A Shaggy Beast from a Baggy Monster." For the story of the politics of canon formation regarding poetry in the period see Nelson, *Repression and Recovery*, and Filreis, *Counter-Revolution of the Word*.

12   See esp. Aldridge, *Talents and Technicians*; Barth, "A Few Words about Minimalism," in his *Further Fridays*.

13   Leerom Medovoi plausibly argues that youth culture during the Cold War established the young rebel as an antiauthoritarian figure essential to national identity at the time and a figure that blazed the trail for the pluralisms of the 1960s.

14   Perhaps the greatest insight of Mark McGurl's contribution to this field of scholarship is his recognition of the professionalized function personal identity has in a research university. Ethnic identity makes creative writing endlessly expandable in the same way that molecules not yet invented make chemistry endlessly expandable.

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"To the imagination, the sacred is self-evident": Thoughts on Spirituality and the Vocation of Creative Writing

J. Matthew Boyleston

In 1630, a man of many gifts with a bright future at court donned the cloth and summarily disappeared into the English landscape. He lived quietly as a country parson with a desire to write poetry. Three centuries later another gifted man, recently ordained, walked into the wilds of north Wales to serve as a priest to the barren terrain and a hostile population – and, in doing so, to write out his great argument with the *deus absconditus*, the absent god. The first was George Herbert; the second, R.S. Thomas. Although so different, Herbert the great poet of the affirmation of God, Thomas the great poet of God's negation, both poets, as so many before and after them, felt the Spirit's dual call to the word – in priesthood as in poetry. My own starting thesis is built upon the profound pronouncement in the Apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:10). I believe that poetry and fiction are ways that the Spirit searches all things, on earth and in heaven, regardless of whether the author is aware of the Spirit or not.

I wish to explore this dual vocation: the great dance between the Spirit and the creative writer. Although few of the writers discussed in this essay actually took holy orders, the interplay between the worlds of religion and literature have produced much of what we consider the best and most moving poetry and fiction: *The Divine Comedy*, *Paradise Lost*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, the poetry of Chaucer, Donne, and Eliot, and the stories of Flannery O'Connor and G.K. Chesterton to name but a few.

At the outset, I would like to be clear: this essay does not address writing whose sole purpose is to actively evangelize or convert, except to warn of the danger to which literature of this type is prone, the artistic death trap of propaganda. Rather, I am concerned with literature that understands that one may address, be led by, and confront the Spirit through the unique position that makes literature what it is. This is not a scholarly treatise, nor a literary history of the influence of religion on literature; rather, I take the title of this volume literally – this essay should be a companion, a friend for those writers beginning to trust the Spirit in their own writings. Consider the Latin roots of *companion*, *com*, with and *panis*, bread. This essay should serve then as a bread-fellow: as I eat, I share my bread. In my own communion, the bread, the body of Christ, is the central act of our Spiritual devotion. It is the place where the eternal, the divine, becomes real in the flesh of this world. But perhaps messmate is an even better translation, for in this essay one will see much that is messy in the pursuit through literature of the Spiritual life. It is more of a grab bag of pointers I have found through my own reading and writing. I intend to build upon C.S. Lewis's assertion that "to believe in the Incarnation at all is to believe that every mode of human excellence is implicit in His historical human character: poethood, of course, included" (3).

Although I do not wish to doubt that direct poetic vision may be given by the Spirit – say in the manner of Blake – this essay will focus more deeply on the common experience the writer of creative work may feel when it comes to Spiritual questions: what J.D. McClatchy, in a review of the work of Charles Wright, calls his poetry's "double purpose: to describe those things not of which this world is made but by which it is seen, and then to use them to return to his beginnings" (Buckley 61).

Because literature leads us deeper into the ultimate Spiritual reality, it is life-affirming and expresses its own belief in transcendence. After all, if nihilism and extreme renunciation of life truly afflicted a writer, would anything ever be written? The fact that there are books written, good and bad, true and untrue, is itself a miracle of the human capacity to heed the Spirit's call.

In a very real sense then, all literature is Spiritual. Spiritual literature should never be marginalized or ghettoized. In the best of regional literature, the very engagement with a particular place in a particular time is the key by which writers engage the universal. Spirituality is similar. It is personal and particular, but also orthodox and universal. Otherwise, we would all exist in our own solipsistic Spiritual bubbles in which no one would connect with our own personal Spiritual travels.

Literature as a life-affirming action is a direct stay against the nihilism that tempts us. Auden is useful here: "In literature, vulgarity is preferable to nullity, just as grocer's port is preferable to distilled water" (*Dyers Hand*, 5).When writers embrace nihilism in their poems, they work in direct contrast against the very nature of literature as well as their better interests. In this essay, I will not give particular ways to call the Spirit – after all, the Spirit comes at its own bidding; however, I present different

methods for the discipline required for the Spirit to manifest. In order to see this most clearly, I frame these methods using the Ten Commandments. I do not intend to produce a ten commandments of writing Spiritual poems and stories; rather, I use these ancient parameters to give us perspective and clarity and to help to keep us from casting the Spirit in our own image. I write this essay as I write my poems: trusting the Spirit, my ear, and the power of association.

"Thou shalt have no other gods before me"

For all of its Spiritual trappings, literature is not an alternative scripture. Literature must be continually in service of the Spirit; however, long this inspiration (*inspirare – breath*; *et spiritu sancti – the holy spirit*) takes. However, as in so many aspects of the Spiritual life, being in service means mutual and subordinate "I/thou" relationship, to use Martin Buber's phrase (56). The power of a poem such as "Song of Myself" comes from the way Whitman resists the poem's reification as an alternative or secularized scripture. His message of Spiritual democracy is imparted through the received rhythms of the King James Bible: "and what I assume/ you shall assume/ or every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" (Whitman 28).

This is the main thrust behind T.S. Eliot's proclamation that true art is not personality. Too often young poets and novelists win awards and publish books because of a particular distinctiveness of voice. Voice is important, but only if it is supported on a foundation of craft and works within the inherent rhythms of one's own language structure. One thinks of John the Baptist's startling statement: He must increase, but I must decrease (John 3:30). Ultimately, the final goal of good art should be this. Through the direct recreation of an imaginative experience of the author, artistically told, one hopes for the reader to have his own experiences in relation to one's art – not the exact experiences of the author. An author should wish that her work leads the Spirit to visit each reader individually, privately and personally.

The key to avoiding an egocentric, false art is rooted in the theological doctrine of the Incarnation. Of all theological doctrines, none is as important to the issue of Spirituality and creative writing as is this. Religions which do not believe in an Incarnation have, at a deeply foundational level, an entirely different idea of the potential of art in this world. Simply put, the Incarnation allows us to believe that the Spirit and matter can exist within each other. God became man. The Spirit became flesh. In a real sense, the incarnation allows us to view the world as holy and as having deep Spiritual significance because God chose the matter he created in which to manifest himself. The stuff of art, words, colors, shapes and sounds, vibrate with the holiness of the Spiritual realm, as do we ourselves. As Rev. R.C. Moberly beautifully explains in the transformative volume *Lux Mundi* (1889): "The religion, which attempts to be rid of the bodily side of things spiritual, sooner or later loses hold of all reality. Pure spiritualism, however noble the aspiration, however living the energy

with which it starts, always has ended at last, and will always end, in evanescence"
(200).

How then does a writer write in relation to God without creating a false idol out
of his own creation? Creative writing should be an act of naming the order that God
made. In this action, writers fulfill our original calling to be namers of the world
created by God: whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name
thereof (Gen. 2:19).

However, writers are not limited to naming created order. One important aspect
of the relationship between the Spirit and the writing is when writers attempt to
name the Spiritual order – to give a name to God, the unnamable, the *tetragramaton*.
In the famous episode in Genesis where Jacob wrestles with an angel, Jacob is only
blessed when he demands a name from his enemy. This Spiritual experience illumi-
nates such a seemingly disturbing poem as Emily Dickinson's "1461": "'Heavenly
Father'/ We apologize to thee/ For thine own Duplicity."

In a similar way, writers are always demanding a blessing from the Spirit and a
name. The name is never given, but in our primal desire to name the world, we are
given the Spiritual blessing of being independent beings created by God. We see this
in a poem such as Galway Kinnell's "The Bear." After tirelessly chasing an injured
polar bear, an Inuit hunter crawls inside the dead bear's carcass to keep warm and is
given a Spiritual vision of himself as the dead bear. The hunter is haunted by the
absent name of this Spiritual vision: "the rest of my days I spend/ wandering: wonder-
ing/ what, anyway,/ was that sticky infusion, that rank flavor of blood, that poetry,
by which I lived?"

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven images"

There has always been tension between the strictures of the second commandment
and the requirements of material art. Even when this problem is surmountable, one
is never far away from those who would minimize human dignity by minimizing its
own image. However, what this commandment actually shows us is that literature
should always be a process that, through its material form, points to a greater truth
that cannot be contained within the prison of words. The Incarnation has given us
the ability to see the holy in material form, but we must use that form as a ladder to
look to the Spiritual form it evidences. This is how Dante is able to see the Beatific
vision through his love of Beatrice. It is also the principle at the heart of Hopkins's
famous poetics of *instress* and *inscape*.

In his journals, Hopkins identified *instress* as the complex web of peculiarities that
gives a thing its uniqueness and differentiates it from all other things. *Inscape* is the
force that holds this web together and communicates it to a viewer. The goal of lit-
erature is to find the *instress* in all things and write of it with *inscape* so that all may
worship God through the creation of each thing in its essence (201, 204). In Hopkins's
poetics, the poet serves to identify and release Spiritual energy.

"Thou shalt not take the name of the lord thy god in vain"

Literature is made of words. This fact, though self-evident, is often ignored. The use of a word carries with it both power and responsibility. It is important to be clear and honest about the way in which words are used and why. The Hebrew for this commandment may be more accurately translated, *do not carry the name of the Lord for a bad cause*. One must never claim as Spiritual that which is not.

Although multidimensional, this ethical and theological standpoint should be grounded upon a simple point of faith: that only God creates (*creare*) out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). We, as His creations, make (*facere*) out of His own creation. To be a creator, or more accurately a "subcreator," is to honor the ultimate creator by reflecting His creative Spirit in the material. Since we live in a story-shaped world, subcreation enables us to align ourselves with the patterns of the stories God has chosen to tell through creation. God is a storytelling God. He tells us stories of himself and we can, in turn, tell him stories of ourselves. This idea was developed to its fullest extent by the unique group of mid twentieth-century writers centered in Oxford, the Inklings: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams, to name only the most prominent. In works like the *Chronicles of Narnia*, the *Lord of the Rings*, and the supernatural thrillers of Williams, these writers embody the rhythms of the created story as an act of worship, Spiritual sustenance, devotion, and wonder.

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy"

I have heard that Mozart claimed he composed the silences around the notes. The act of concentration is the primary skill necessary in both meditation and writing. Composition is as much rest as it is writing; stillness as concentration. Although many may disagree, literature is written against a background of silence. It is not visual. The rhythm of a work is created by ordering stresses against the nothingness of rest.

Thomas Merton writes about the importance of waiting in silence:

> The best thing for me is a lucid silence that does not even imagine it speaks to anybody. A silence in which I see no interlocutor, frame no message for anyone, formulate no word either for man or paper. There will still be plenty to say when the times come to write, and what is written will be simpler and more fruitful. ("Journal Entry")

One cannot rush the Spirit. We must listen for the "still small voice" of God's inspiration. Writing is lonely and requires a disciplined withdrawal from the bustle of a chaotic world.

Lastly, it is through writing that one must acknowledge the sacred. To keep the Sabbath ultimately is to keep one's perspective on the sacred and its primacy in a world in that it is too easy to become lost in the rounds of material responsibilities.

Every time a writer experiences the "force that through the green fuse drives the flower" one participates in the Sabbath (Dylan Thomas 77). This sacredness and stillness are the rest of a writer's true Sabbath.

"Honor thy father and thy mother"

It is significant that scripture asks us to honor our parents, not to love them. Honor, in part, is to give homage as well as to give grace. In feudal law, to give homage meant that one publicly acknowledged allegiance to those from whom one held land. To give grace means both to thank and to confer honor or dignity on someone. Therefore, to honor one's father or mother means to thank them from whom one has been given a home and to declare one's identity in one's roots. This is a commandment about ancestors: one's people, one's place. Home is composed of two equally important conditions: people and place. Consider the *Odyssey*. Without him, Penelope is as homeless as is wandering Odysseus. His presence turns place into home. As all living things, art sprouts from a particular place and reflects it. It is a moral imperative, intimately known by an author such as Faulkner in his own little postage stamp of soil, that to honor a home is to get the details just right. Seamus Heaney, in his essay "Feeling into Words," describes the composition of his famous poem "Digging." In the poem, Heaney memorializes the farmwork of his father and grandfather and meditates upon the relationship between the field work of his fathers and his own work as a writer:

> "Digging," in fact, was the name of the first poem I wrote where I thought my feeling had got into words, or to put it more accurately, where I thought my *feel* had got into words . . . I felt that I had let down a shaft into real life, poetry as revelation of the self to the self, as restoration of the culture to itself; poems as elements of continuity. (*Finders Keepers* 41)

Wordsworth calls this "The hiding places of my power" (567); imagery, the patterns of sound that capture the dialect of local speech, "the cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap/ of soggy peat," the respect for the work of his father, and his *fathers*: "But I've no spade to follow men like them/ between my finger and my thumb/ The squat pen rests./ I'll dig with it" that allow him to "get his feel into his words" (Heaney, "Digging"). Heaney's devotional call to capture with accuracy the unique and particular rhythms of his home through all its generations is his sense of grace and homage, his honoring of his father and his mother.

"Thou shalt not kill"

As stated earlier, creative writing must be life-affirming to have any worth at all. As Portia in the *Merchant of Venice* says of mercy: "it is twice blest, / It blesseth him that

gives, and him that takes" (Shakespeare 111). So too is creative writing. It blesses those who write and those who read. To kill a piece of writing means to deny its affirmation of life. Specifically, it means to distort certain characteristics of the writing at the expense of others. This is so with propaganda or sentimentality. People are able to appreciate a great assortment of poetic characteristics. To emphasize one of these at the expense of others is to write sentimentally. This type of writing kills because it teaches the reader to lessen her own ability to appreciate life's great, God-given diversity.

Sentimental writing is popular because it requires so much less of us as readers. It is simpler for a reader to focus on one element of creative writing, one element of a story – say, emotion, violence, suspense – than it is to learn to appreciate the balance created through the interplay of all elements working in harmony. The effect of prolonged exposure to this is grievous. Countless people have been disappointed because their first loves did not live up to the sentimental description of lovers in romance novels.

Propaganda is subject to the same problems. It distorts political life by emphasizing one part against the greater whole. What makes Yeats's "Easter, 1916" such a moving and effective political poem is its refusal to see the political life as simplistic or even dualistic: "A terrible beauty is born." Propaganda kills through manipulation of our own base instincts such as desire or hatred. It encourages us to see ourselves as limited creatures in need of control.

"Thou shalt not commit adultery"

I completed my M.F.A. at an old but small creative writing program. I was, in some sense, a big fish in a small pound. I pursued my doctoral work in a graduate school that was both large and more elite. Coming from where I did, without the recommendation of prize-winning poets or an extensive publishing record, and without really developing a sense of my own voice, I often felt that I would be "found out" as a poetic phony. In reaction to this, I hid behind teaching countless classes of freshman composition. I avoided the very thing for which I came: writing poetry.

Looking back, I do not actually believe my reaction was one of a lack of self-confidence. I am neither a timid person nor prone to self-debasement. I believe I committed poetic adultery. I did not stay true to the Spirit inside because I allowed my lack of confidence in my formless, seemingly pointless jottings of lines to keep me from pursuing a vein of creativity (the Spirit working inside me). Because my poems did not look like poems in the workshop, or poems being published by other students, I tried to write against the grain of the Spirit. These poems were neither satisfying to write nor satisfying to read; it is no wonder that I stopped writing and filled my time with other "worthwhile" pursuits that kept me from facing my sense of failure and shame.

I am not suggesting that young writers should not experiment or pursue seemingly foreign directions in their writings. Even dead ends are useful, if one learns why a particular path did not work. What I am suggesting is that one must listen to the type of rhythms, sounds, and images that speak most deeply. An excellent illustration of this faithfulness is Edward Thomas's poem "Old Man." Robert Frost led Thomas, who had written beautiful books of nonfiction and travel for years, to write poetry. Frost, upon reading Thomas's book *In Pursuit of Spring* declared that it was poetry "but in prose form where it did not declare itself" and that Thomas needed to "write it in verse form in exactly the same cadence" (Marsh 113). In "Old Man" we hear the honesty of speech in lines such as:

> Old Man, or Lad's-love, – in the name there's nothing
> To one that knows not Lad's-love, or Old Man,
> The hoar-green feathery herb, almost a tree,
> Growing with rosemary and lavender. (10).

The faithfulness to the Spirit that Thomas shows in not ending the last line, "Growing with lavender and rosemary" to complete the rhyme is monumental in the development of his own particular, authentic voice. If we are most ourselves when we are in the Spirit, then to force ourselves to create the Spirit is a type of adultery.

"Thou shalt not steal"

Although T.S. Eliot assures us that "immature poets imitate, mature poets steal" (153), this particular commandment addresses one of the primary problems with young writers – the too quick pursuit of voice – especially voice without grammar, which is the art of inventing and combing symbols. I have heard that in her workshops at Harvard Elizabeth Bishop gave final exams in which she had removed the punctuation from famous poems and asked students to repunctuate them. This exercise forced students to begin to hear the relationship between rhythm and grammar – in a certain way, similar to Frost's idea of the sound of sense. By grammar, I do not merely mean punctuation rules; rather, the rhythms and syntax that are particular to the character of a given language – the soul of a language. This was one of Eliot's main complaints against the poetry of Milton: that Milton wrote English poetry as if it were Latin poetry and by doing so wrote against the character of what makes English distinctively English. Failure to acknowledge and perfect a grammar of language in the too hasty pursuit of voice can lead a young writer to stumble in a bizarre, yet common type of writing – bad good early poetry or fiction. This is writing that is good in terms of form, style, voice – but is limpid and ungrounded. This poetry is theft. The young poet or novelist steals his voice at the expense of the voice of the art.

"Thou shalt not bear false witness"

James Dickey, the great poet and novelist, was one of my first teachers. His most important bit of advice to aspiring writers was to learn to lie. At first, his advice would seem to contradict the clear intentions of this commandment. However, what Dickey was getting at was the necessity of the writer to rely on his imagination. Secondly, Dickey wanted us all to understand that we were not writing biography, but rather, using our biography to trigger writing. What we wrote was not us. It existed for its own sake and, in this, freed us from ourselves.

To not bear false witness in writing means to not lie against the nature of the poem or story by trying to force it to be something it is not. Too often we want our writing to fulfill our own psychological needs, or give us the last word on a situation, say a breakup or our relationship with our mothers and fathers. But the story or poem exists by its own artistic inspiration. To bear false witness means to not trust the Spirit as it leads us to the creations we were meant to write – which is not necessarily the same as what we wanted to write. One must allow the poem to tell one what it should say. Consider James Dickey's disturbing ode to bestiality, "The Sheep Child." One sincerely hopes that this poem did not germinate in firsthand knowledge. Still, if Dickey had not suffered the inspiration calling him to write on this perverted and controversial subject, we would be without the amazing achievement that is a testimony to the power of poetry to transcend all prejudice: the sheep child's tender voice that speaks from the dead:

> *I am here, in my father's house.*
> *I who am half of your world, came deeply*
> *To my mother in the long grass*
> *Of the west pasture, where she stood like moonlight*
> *Listening for foxes.*

"Thou shalt not covet"

Writers are notoriously jealous creatures. It is perhaps true, as Auden says: "No poet or novelist wishes he were the only one who ever lived, but most of them wish they were the only one alive, and quite a number fondly believe their wish has been granted" (*The Dyer's Hand*, 14). A writer must learn not to covet the experience of God. For some writers, R.S. Thomas for instance, God is the great *deus absconditus*, the absent God – evident merely from the God-shaped hole in one's soul. For others, Charles Williams says, God is the eternal presence – even the presence in absence.

One also thinks of Frost in "Desert Places": "I have it so much nearer home to scare myself with my own desert places" (296). Yet the same poet, in "Directive," is able to give the most haunting and soothing of last lines: "Here are your waters and your

watering place. Drink and be whole again, without confusion" (379). To covet either Spiritual revelation or poetic voice breaks this interpretive relationship, this trinity between the reader, the writer, and the Holy Spirit. It is also a type of poetic or Spiritual fundamentalism to assume that one's experience of the holy should be the experience of all.

Conclusion

The question then left is this: is literature, poetry specifically, prayer? In the beautiful definition given in the 1979 American Book of Common Prayer, prayer is "responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with or without words" ("An Outline," 856). This definition is further expanded to define Christian prayer as "the response to God the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit." If poetry, and by extension literature, is prayer, then it is a type of communion of prayer among the writer, the reader, and God. This trinity of participation should always be at the forefront of the writer's consciousness. In his "Theology of the Body" sermons, John Paul II described the trinity of the family, husband, wife, child, as an earthly expression of the interplay among the three persons of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Perhaps the participating trinity of literature, the writer, the reader, and God, is a similar trinity that enables us to be in community with the divine in his own storytelling capacity. I do think this explains the deep charity, humility and even humor of a poem such as George Herbert's "Love (III)": "Love said, sit down and taste my meat/ so I did sit and eat."

During the writing of this essay, my grandmother, a woman very dear to me, passed away. I was immediately struck by the primacy of this question: what response does literature give to the reality of death? But I mean more than the complicated affair literature has often had with politics. What concerns me is this: does literature provide a way by which one can choose to celebrate life in the sure and certain face of death.

I believe it does. There are many poems about grief. But I am not interested here in the ability of literature to eulogize. Rather, I ask if literature resists the decay, the boredom and the dread that marks the real death-in-life that is our world of, what a former professor of mine aptly named "normal nihilism". What can I write about my grandmother that will not ring hollow and untrue?

The answer is not in the literary merit of the work, but in the process of writing and reading that is the province of the writer. In our constant search for ultimate meaning through the written word, we, in a real sense, create this meaning by searching for it. Creative writing is its own ontological proof of God's existence. We know there is a God because we argue constantly with him through our words.

C.K. Williams illustrates this point well in his poem "The Gas Station," and in doing so provides four touchstone terms by which we may sum up the interplay between the world of the Spirit and the world of writer. In the poem, Williams interweaves the memory of a horrid night spent with a prostitute with a litany of wise

thinkers he has either not yet read or does not fully understand, including Nietzsche, Kant and Kierkegaard. He is equally disgusted and fascinated by the grotesque utilitarianism of the prostitute as she gives oral sex in the dirty bathroom of a gas station. None of the great thinkers in the poem gives the speaker Spiritual guidance or is able to answer the question he asks: "Why am I doing this?" None are able to explain the intermingling of sex and death the speaker witnesses. His only recourse is to give an impassioned plea to the Spirit for guidance: "Complicity. Wonder./ . . . Grace. Love./ Take care of us. Please" (112).

Complicity. We must write as if we know we are part and parcel of this world.

Wonder. We must write as if all the world is "charged with the grandeur of God" (Hopkins 128).

Grace. We must write as if all our skill were but a gift of salvation, of wholeness.

Love. We must "love your crooked neighbor/ with your crooked heart" (Auden, "As I Walked Out," 135).

Complicity. Wonder. Grace. Love. Take care of us. Please.

NOTE

The quotation in the title (originally William Blake) is from W.H. Auden, *The Dyer's Hand*, p. 456.

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The Writer-Teacher in the United States: The Place of Teachers in the Community of Writers

Patrick Bizzaro

I celebrate myself
And what I assume you shall assume
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you

Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself"

American artists of the nineteenth century sought an aesthetic different in kind from that of their European predecessors, something homegrown and distinct. The epigraph to this essay, Walt Whitman's 1855 introduction of his poet-persona to American letters, introduces the uniquely American foundation of a writer-teacher pedagogy that has survived in American educational institutions under various guises. As I will argue, the writer-teacher, which I will distinguish from the teacher-writer as both are presented in contemporary thinking, has evolved from the Puritan view of the individual's responsibility to the community, to the "self" of American Romanticism, to the "individual experience" of pragmatism, and more recently, to the valuing of writers' experiences in the teaching of writing in the academy.

Puritanism, Emerson and "an indestructible instinct"

We may seem to begin *in medias res* by starting with Emerson's "The American Scholar," for certainly something preceded him and something followed. But the rhetorical reason for beginning with the great American Transcendentalist in this

discussion of the writer-teacher in the United States is to demarcate a point of con-
vergence in the wilderness of this argument, as the great twentieth-century American
Romantic poet Wallace Stevens does in "Anecdote of the Jar" by placing a jar on a
hill in Tennessee:

> I placed a jar in Tennessee,
> And round it was, upon a hill.
> It made the slovenly wilderness
> Surround that hill.

On the basis of my current perception of the wilderness and chaos that was American
poetry in the mid-nineteenth century and, correspondingly, settlers' experiences a
hundred years earlier, Emerson seems to me to stand as a focal point of sorts which,
like Stevens's jar, brings order to the chaos: "the wilderness rose up to it,/ And
sprawled around, no longer wild."

 "The American Scholar," an address Emerson delivered in 1837 before the Phi Beta
Kappa Society at Cambridge, served Emerson as both an invocation to American
scholars as well as an effort to better define for himself his chosen vocation (see
Emerson 475). As such, by its very form, "The American Scholar" is an early enact-
ment of the writer-teacher paradigm. Emerson speaks of an idealized American scholar
to a larger audience we might characterize as novice scholars. The Puritan influence
is apparent in this address, especially as it advocates the individual's connection to
the community and the individual's need to break free of European precedent.

 The Puritan ethic that links individual to community serves as a starting point for
Emerson and comes to represent America's emerging consciousness of itself. This ethic
enables us to connect Puritanism with Transcendentalism in America; they both settle
wildernesses of various kinds – physical as well as intellectual, geographic as well as
aesthetic – that represent the taming of the wild new world without reliance on
European precedent as well as development of an epistemology unique to America,
what Cornell West describes as the "American evasion of philosophy." For Emerson,
nature itself presents us with the first opportunity to share experience and thereby
foster the scholar's growth, and the scholar in his relation to the intricacies of nature
must perceive "that these objects are not chaotic, and are not foreign, but have a law
which is also a law of the human mind" (66). In Emerson's thinking, then, the Puritan
model for the literal acts of taming the wilderness in the individual's commitment to
the community becomes characteristic of the American scholar as well, who is likewise
portrayed as one who is committed to helping the community solve certain other
problems that the scholar, by means of his experience, has already solved. This view
of settlers is at once historic and prophetic, in the moment but also, as it ends up, in
moments to come.

 One such moment to come, the work of American pragmatists, is predicated on
the insistence that any method devised to help people live in the new world at the
beginning of time must require individuals to theorize paths through wildernesses,

all of which are new to them and unique to their situation. Precedent elsewhere in time and place would be of no help at all. Whitman, in "Song of Myself," puts it like this: "You shall no longer take things at second or third hand." Indeed, reflection upon the actions they took would help individuals and their larger community once they shared their experiences with others. By the time we get to Emerson, this pragmatic notion has become not only a way of thinking but also a method for scholarly enterprise.

In short, the American project of determining how to survive in the wilderness that is the new world begins in action and experience, becomes generalizable as knowledge, and then by ethical imperative is transferred to others who must traverse the same or a similar terrain to achieve similar ends. Clearly, there was no adequate preparation for the American project. It was, after all, the settling of a *new* world at the beginning of time. Fittingly, Emerson's "The American Scholar" is overtly against basing scholarship on received wisdom. Rather, Emerson bases his view of American intellectual independence on the actions and experiences of the "One Man," who is the Titanic American man and the whole of society simultaneously, as Emerson explains: "there is One Man, – present to all particular men only partially, or through one faculty; and . . . you must take the whole society to find the whole man" (64). This view of man as organized by the sum of his parts – which are individual faculties of mind but at the same time individual men – is reminiscent of Blake's "Giant Forms," the fully integrated Albion in particular.

Emerson obviously writes at a different time than Blake and in a different place. As an American, Emerson writes at the *beginning* of history, not after the fall, as Blake perceived himself to write. Emerson's One Man too, like Blake's Albion, is divisible into parts, and the fall itself when it happens likewise is a fall from perfection. But unlike Blake's Urizen, whose actions represent reason's effort to dominate the integrated psyche, that part in the Emersonian cosmology, "the delegated intellect" of the scholar, must at the beginning of time resist influences that would destroy perfect harmony and drive the One Man toward the fall. Emerson seizes the opportunity, at the beginning of time in America, to insist upon the value of individual experience and to simultaneously assert his belief (and Blake's) that all existence begins in untainted universal and psychic harmony. And the scholar (or some dominating portion of the scholar's intellect) will be responsible (like Blake's Rational Urizen) if, in the evolution of man in America, universal and psychic disintegration occurs, for those breakdowns will happen simultaneously.

The scholar as "designated intellect" at the beginning of time must resist influences that would destroy perfect harmony, including those that come from places where that harmony has already been destroyed. In a sense, then, Emerson's independence of thought from his European counterparts is an answer to the question, "Why repeat what has failed?" On the contrary, scholars must find out *from their experiences* what works and then pass that information on to others. Later, Dewey will see this method as the means for passing cultural and societal values forward, a model for the way learning might best take place in our democratic educational institutions. For Emerson

and Whitman, who echoes many of Emerson's sentiments, America is a new opportunity if one only learns to navigate the wildernesses there, geographical as well as intellectual.

This American Romanticism places the burden for salvation of the whole where it should be, on its best thinkers, its scholars, who must insulate themselves from foreign influences which are not based upon actions and experiences in *this* new world. The scholar must not be "a mere thinker" or a "bookworm." He must not "set out from accepted dogmas" because "the books of an older period will not fit these" (Emerson 67). In this new world people have entered, the precedents available are irrelevant. Emerson reminds us that those whose judgments we might use in lieu of making our own have no experience with transcendent insight of the sort only possible, uniquely imaginable, in the new world. "Cicero, Locke, and Bacon were only young men *in libraries* when they wrote these books," writes Emerson (67, emphasis added).

Emerson values most "the active soul," not the man who may see a book in a library and "be warped by its attraction clean out of orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system" (68). Blake's idea of energy in "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" corresponds to Emerson's idea of action in "The American Scholar." Indeed, what seems most important to me about the case Emerson makes for traversing the new world in "The American Scholar" is his stress on the "active," especially insofar as it anticipates the later use of "experience" in the works of avowed pragmatists like William James and John Dewey. "Books," writes Emerson, "are for the scholars' idle times" (68).

Indeed, the scholar must not be a recluse, insulated from productive thought by what Blake calls a "spectre," the dominating rational portion of the individual psyche. Emerson continues, "I do not see how any man can afford for the sake of his nerves and his nap, to spare any action in which he can partake" (70). For Emerson confronting intellectual chaos, as for any Puritan confronting the wilderness, action comes first and "he who has put forth his total strength in fit actions has the richest return of wisdom" (71). As I will argue later, Emerson speaks of action as Dewey speaks of experience and as expressivists speak of self-discovery. Philosophers have long sought to understand what it is that connects individuals to communities, to groups of other individuals. For Emerson, action is necessary for that connection to take place, and that metaphor is an outgrowth of Puritan practice. Only after action is taken and reflected upon does "the new seed" become "a part of life," to use Emerson's language of organicism. It remains in the mind for consideration before it may profitably be passed on to others; it "remains for a time immersed in our unconscious life." Because they must act and convert action into knowledge regarding their unique situation, American thinkers should no longer imitate their European predecessors. Thus, a new method for the experiment called America, pragmatism, was developed.

It is not surprising, then, that Roskelly and Ronald call pragmatism "a philosophical system unique to the United States" (32). As such, it is a worthy predecessor of the teacher-writer paradigm where the teacher acts and experiences, reflects, and only

then is prepared to share knowledge with others. Let us then consider how this Emersonian epistemology moves forward through important pragmatic thinkers to become a pedagogy of use in teaching writing.

Pragmatism: "the common air that bathes the globe" and Individual Experience

With Emerson, the American experiment defined its methodology for making knowledge in this new world. The development of a method for converting action into transmissible knowledge is a fundamental outgrowth of the Puritan mission, as I have thus far argued, as it comes to us through Emerson and continues forward through William James and John Dewey to the pragmatic writer-teachers (and some teacher-writers) of the late twentieth century. In particular, Emerson provided a method by which the actions of individuals, when reflected upon, could be converted into knowledge for the benefit of others. Emerson calls this "a law of the human mind" and, from that statement, I construe Emerson (and Whitman) to mean a shared sense among people, a collectively unconscious awareness that they must use to help each other survive. Whitman in "Song of Myself" describes it as "the grass that grows wherever the land is and the water is,/ This the common air that bathes the globe" (37).

A good place to get a better understanding of what pragmatism came to be by the end of the century is James's lecture "What Pragmatism Means." In it James states that the focus of a pragmatic method is on *consequences* and *outcomes*. He says, "It is astonishing to see how many philosophical disputes collapse into insignificance the moment you subject them to this simple test of tracing a concrete consequence" (3). James stresses that pragmatism "is a method only" and that one goal of that method is to "set it at work within the stream of your experience" (4). Pragmatism is focused on outcomes, means to ends, "The attitude of looking away from first things . . .; and of looking towards last things . . ."

Significantly, none of the major pragmatists discussed here claims that pragmatism leads to truth. Rather, its antifoundational character insists upon experience as the first cause of thought and the sharing of successful actions, the ethical consequence of reflection, as a kind of responsibility to the community. Still, in its stress on community, it does not deny the importance of individuals whose acts constitute points of departure. Whitman writes of his poetry what might be said of pragmatism: "These are really the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands." Emerson and Whitman hold to the belief in a universal consciousness that has the potential to emerge in the new world, a consciousness that would be lost after the fall. Roskelly and Ronald similarly state, "Pragmatic theory is restless, unsettled in its conclusions and methods. It is an imperfect theory that looks for its proofs everywhere and in everyone" (87). I would add to both of these statements that pragmatism is an expression and deeper understanding of the Puritan adventure of confronting and reflecting upon the visible

wilderness. But more. With Emerson, James, and Dewey, pragmatism becomes internalized in an American way of thinking about education and, in particular, as a method for problem solving of all kinds. We might argue that Dewey passes pragmatism forward to writing teachers who use it in developing yet one more pragmatic theory, expressivism, which in the hands of writers is the basis for the writer-teacher and teacher-writer paradigms in the United States, which I will distinguish from each other.

James expresses the pragmatists' view of truth: "Truth is what *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true" (quoted in Roskelly and Ronald). What makes it true? According to James, *events* do. If this is so, then the best model for educating others is one based on events but one that also requires reflection upon those events. It must measure by its outcomes the success of its practices. This view is inevitably rhetorical and ideological – American, if you will. Dewey for one connects events with democracy and experience. For Dewey, education should be based on "the process by which social groups maintain their continuous existence" (321). But it is also "a process of renewal of the meanings of experience through a process of transmission, partly incidental to the ordinary companionship or intercourse of adults and youth, partly deliberately instituted to effect social continuity" (321–322). According to Dewey, this view of education "based upon the democratic criterion was . . . to imply the ideal of a continuous reconstruction or reorganizing of experience" (322).

Learning, for the Dewey of *Democracy and Education*, happens in a range of environments, including school. To model school-learning on "the process by which social groups maintain their continuous existence" is to bring into the schools processes of transmission that allow learning to take place in its most democratic way, in a way unique to each individual but in a curriculum based upon those experiences elders believe lead to the desired outcome. As Emerson and Whitman describe it, this model seems to precede our consciousness of it and reveals itself only as we discover it. I'd add that the use of learning in the wilderness outside the schoolroom is consistent with the Emersonian metaphor for learning modeled after the Puritans, as I have discussed it previously in this essay. This process of learning, in Dewey's view of it, is organic, natural as bodily growth:

> Society exists through a process of transmission quite as much as biological life. This transmission occurs by means of communication of *habits of doing, thinking, and feeling from the older to the younger*. Without this communication of ideals, hopes, expectations, standards, opinions, from those members of society who are passing out of the group life to those who are coming into it, social life could not survive. (Dewey 3, emphasis added)

Again here, we are reminded of the line of thought that travels from the Puritans through Emerson to James and now to Dewey. That line of intellection emphasizes the process of transmission – the "communication," to use Dewey's term – of experience ("habits of doing, thinking, and feeling") from those who have acted, experi-

enced, and reflected upon their acts ("the older") to those who are learning those habits ("the younger"). As the quote above suggests, this process works equally well in transmitting societal values as in teaching writing habits. Education, then, is the process of transmitting known habits from the experienced to the novice (Emerson to recent Harvard graduates, for instance). In our particular case in this essay, we might argue that writing skills, from this perspective, are best passed to students by those who have first-hand experience as writers. How has this writer-teacher paradigm taken shape in American education over the past 50 years or so? Who are some of these writer-teachers in American education? What are their theories? What do they emphasize about writing? Are the writer-teacher and the teacher-writer one and the same?

Expressivist or Pragmatist: The Writer-Teacher Tradition and the Valuing of Writerly Experience

I have argued in "Research and Reflection in English Studies," a study of creative writing's emergence as a discipline in English Studies in the United States, that its improved status required its contextualization with other disciplines in English departments . As most people know, literature long dominated English departments in America until the mid-1980s. Composition programs, which contributed mightily to the financial well-being of English departments by virtue of being required of all students, asserted its power-as-capital and thereby established itself as a field with not only its own (required) course(s) but also with an increasing number of doctoral programs around the country, unique graduate courses, and acceptable research agendas that would enable compositionists to obtain tenure and promotion. In short, composition's financial independence and aggressive politics in the US (see Hairston) enabled the field to position itself in American universities in ways we are still examining and trying to understand.

My view of creative writing's improved status has much to do with its relationships with composition studies and literature. In an essay in 2004, I made the following observation, pertinent to the improved status of the writer-teacher in American universities in 2012: "creative writing's lack of status in most departments in which it is taught has coincided with its subordination – like the subordination nowadays of theory and multicultural literatures – to literary study, if requirements for graduation are any indication" ("Research and Reflection," 296). I had already argued that critical theory and multicultural literatures, though "strong fields worthy of greater status in English departments," in my view in 2004 "have been absorbed as they have by literary studies, much as creative writing had for nearly a hundred years" (294). Though creative writing did not have a pulpit to speak from during the late 1980s and early 1990s in asserting its independence, as composition had when Maxine Hairston gave her address in 1984 as chair of the Conference on College Composition and Communication ("Breaking Our Bonds and Reaffirming Our Connections"), creative

writing by being contextualized in the work of Wendy Bishop just a few years later (1999) asserted its independence in English departments nonetheless. More specifically, "Academic independence for creative writing requires an assertion of its epistemological differences from other subjects in English studies, an assertion theory and multicultural literatures have not yet [in 2004] made" (Bizzaro, "Research and Reflection," 296).

Central to epistemological differences, as I think of them, is what a creative writer construes as data or evidence. Those who advocate for the necessity that we assert creative writing's differences from other disciplines in English Studies have found it difficult to assert those differences because, in many graduate programs in English across America, creative writing remains absorbed not only by literary studies but now by composition studies as well. Two clear examples of this ongoing subordination of creative writing in English Studies are in the oft-required "methods of literary research" course which is most often taught by professors of literature and, therefore, emphasize skills quite different from the research skills creative writers are most apt to employ. The second is the stock course in "the teaching of writing," required in most graduate programs across the country, which has been taught to creative writing students by composition studies faculty, not creative writers, in the assumption, I suppose, that writing is writing. Kelly Ritter has made the important call for "markers of professional difference" for creative writing graduates, but thus far the most creative writers have been able to assert is the belief that these markers, indeed, exist but continue to be absorbed by literary and composition studies. In my view, for these courses to hold meaning for creative writers, they must be taught by creative writers who have *pertinent experiences as writers* so that the skills taught will be more useful for the students once they graduate with their degrees.

The rapid ascendance of composition in American universities since 1984 seems to have resulted in a kind of hypercorrection that I have called "the (com)positioning of writing in the academy" ("Writers' Self-Reports"). The important work of Wendy Bishop in the early 1990s has been to argue that creative writing might learn much from composition. This strategy has had mixed results for creative writing teachers. On the one hand, this was a wise move insofar as it gave composition specialists another estate to claim as their own, simultaneously strengthening creative writing's place in English departments. In the effort to democratize creative writing, then, the promise of access to the writing of poems and stories attracted greater numbers of students to writing tracks than ever before, students Donald Hall described as having very little ambition *as writers*.

But there is a further consequence to (com)positioning that must be mentioned. For one, the Conference on College Composition and Communication, equally enamored with Bishop as with itself, adopted creative writing as a red-headed stepchild of sorts, invited to the annual CCCC convention but only to further show the generosity and open-mindedness of its more powerful academic elder, composition. They are not necessarily comfortable partners in this endeavor, however. But unified as they have been since the early 1990s, we cannot speak of the writer-teacher in the US without

speaking of that paradigm in both composition studies and creative writing. And therein lies the issue of identity that made it necessary for Bishop to dichotomize writer-teachers and teacher-writers, as I will explain.

Writer-Teacher and Teacher-Writer Identities: Self-Identification and Self-Representation in Composition Studies

My perspective on pragmatism and therefore on the writer-teacher requires, as I have been arguing, that teachers experience solutions to the problems students confront as writers, reflect upon those experiences, and then share their insights with the larger community. This three-part process is typical of the ways compositionists Peter Elbow, Donald Murray, and Wendy Bishop – who I will argue are pragmatists in their methods but teacher-writers in their identities – entered the profession. A pragmatic orientation toward teaching writing can be found well developed in Bishop's "Places to Stand," an essay in which she posits "I can no more imagine being a writing teacher who does not write than I can imagine being one who does not read" (14).

In "Places to Stand," Bishop identifies Elbow as the prototype "teacher-who-writes" and Murray as the model "writer-who-teaches." Within the composition community, however, these labels mean something slightly different from what I believe they mean in a creative writing context. But Bishop too positions herself in this group by saying that "inevitably, always, I am one or the other," the teacher-writer or the writer-teacher. About the teacher-writer, Bishop says, "that . . . position allows us to be relatively uninterested in publishing our writing yet highly interested in the act of writing from a writer's perspective; we could become teachers who write for the self, for informal friendly forums – friends, family" (14). Murray comes to represent for Bishop the figure of the writer-who-teaches because of his experiences, first and foremost, as a writer who *is* relatively interested in publishing his writing: "Murray is a publishing journalist and creative writer and he teaches composition based on his writerly experience" (14). But I believe Murray's pedagogical theories do not require teachers to be writers first. It is worth exploring these distinctions further because they influence our ways of thinking about *writer* as an identity.

What I like best about Bishop's work in "Places to Stand" is that she defines for us what we mean when we refer to writers in the academy and then applies both definitions to herself. The easy equation is that writer = expressivist, if like Elbow and Murray they approach writing as a means of self-discovery and believe in individual "voice." But Elbow and Murray are two different kinds of writers, and on this point I part ways with Bishop. Elbow is portrayed as a former nonwriter, a "blocked dissertation writer who needed to finish and who studies his own writing process and eventually survives to tell us about it" (14). Murray is characterized as "a publishing journalist and creative writer." Bishop provides evidence of both in her claim that

they are writers: Elbow is identified as a writer because he wrote a dissertation and studied his process of doing so in the manner I will describe more thoroughly below; Murray is represented as a writer because of his publications and writing awards. Do they claim the identity of writer similarly? An important distinction needs to be made here by reference to studies of identity. Needless to say, I hold the belief that "writer" is, indeed, an identity and that Elbow and Murray are different sorts of writers, though they both approach the teaching of writing in the hope their students will become writers too, not necessarily publishing writers.

In "Toward a Rhetoric of Self-Representation," Ellen Cushman studies how two scholars identify themselves as Native Americans. One *self-identifies*; that is, one makes "a claim about [his] identity that needs no other evidence" (323). Cushman continues, by contrast, asserting that the other self-represents – that is, she makes "an identity claim that includes *evidence of identity markers* valued by multiple audiences" (emphasis added). Cushman thus posits that, in some instances, "self identification . . . is far too problematic to be relied upon as the sole indicator of . . . affiliation and can lead to charges of identity fraud." Self-representation, by contrast, is more persuasive in some groups "because it includes authenticity markers recognized" by other members of the group. The self-identified writer makes the claim of being a writer and needs no other evidence. This claim characterizes Elbow, though I believe Murray and Elbow and even Bishop end up in basically the same place in their orientation toward students – that is, as teacher-writers. Still, the self-represented writer (a group which includes most creative writing teachers in postsecondary education) uses widely accepted markers to provide evidence of their status as writers, including publication, public readings of their writing, and graduate study in creative writing.

The distinction between self-identification and self-representation, though quite helpful here, is less crucial, it seems to me, in composition studies than in creative writing studies; securing a position as a teacher of composition has not thus far *required* that a candidate be a published writer. As a result, Bishop was wise to distinguish the writer-teacher from the teacher-writer, the latter designation befitting most teachers of composition who also write. Let me give a quick example of how I think this distinction serves us. The National Writing Project posits the confusing belief that "the best teachers of writing are writers themselves." But this seems to me a call for teachers-who-write, not writers-who-teach. As a past director of a site of the National Writing Project, I have had to explain this claim on the first day of many a summer institute to high school English teachers who do not identify as writers. The easy solution for me has always been to say they *do* write – lesson plans, letters to parents, etc. This may qualify these teachers to teach composition from the teacher-writer perspective but they probably will never be hired to teach creative writing in a post-secondary institution, which has long required a writer-as-teacher. As Wallace Stegner has famously said about his creative writing staff at Stanford: "We are staffed by writers – not teachers who write, but writers who teach." This view persists if the MLA Job Information List is any indication. Those hiring creative writers to teach in American universities in 2013 still by and large want to hire writer-teachers, the

better (and more) the publications, the more likely to be hired. Though things may change, a teacher to be hired to teach composition in secondary and postsecondary education, though in need of signs of professional development, need not publish in the big journals in the field to qualify for employment. If that were the case most of our first-year students would go without first-year composition.

These more subtle differences notwithstanding, Elbow and Murray have both worked as pragmatists, starting with experience, moving into reflection, and sharing what they have learned with the larger community. My point is that they both, by virtue of their hope that others can become writers and their focus chiefly on composition, advocate for a democratization that creative writing purists generally do not acknowledge, though they must certainly like what democratization has done by bringing them more creative writing students than ever before.

A Writer-Teacher in Composition Studies Is Often a Teacher-Writer

Bishop notes in "Places to Stand" that Elbow had a dissertation he needed to finish and had difficulty doing so because he was a weak writer. By most standards, Elbow would not be considered a writer-teacher. Bishop rightly describes Elbow as the prototype *teacher-writer* because he studied his own writing behaviors, especially how he "unstuck" himself from his writing problems, and then developed a pedagogy from that experience, now known widely as expressivism.[1] Bishop contrasts Elbow with Murray, whom she identifies as a teacher-writer instead of a *writer-teacher*, and that distinction is not only critical to this essay but serves as an easy binary that I want to dispute. I believe Elbow, Murray, and Bishop all have written, reflected on their writing, and then developed advice to writers based upon those experiences. Given our definition of pragmatism in this essay, they all three are pragmatists.

So it is indeed possible, then, to be a pragmatist without being a writer-teacher. But this assertion needs some analysis too. I want to insist that a teacher might become a writer and a writer a teacher, but a teacher who devalues markers of authenticity for writers is not, by my very definition, a writer-teacher. Though Elbow develops his pedagogy for teaching writing by enacting Dewey's individual-social dialectic in which the "older" teaches the "younger," he has been vulnerable to attack for his view of creative writing, poetry in particular, "as no big deal." And the basis for this attack applies equally well to Murray.

One might be inclined to say that Murray is, indeed, a writer-teacher, chiefly because Bishop has labeled him so. He was a journalist, after all, who won the Pulitzer. He also wrote novels. But in his pedagogy, as he has described it, he diminished the importance of markers of authenticity for teachers. In *A Writer Teaches Writing* he writes: "Publication completes the process of writing, and teachers of composition will find a satisfaction in that completeness" (249). True, then, Murray values markers

of authenticity (publication) because they increase the reputation and competence of the writing teacher and reassure students: "The teacher, the teacher's colleagues, and students will all benefit from the increased competence of a teacher who is practicing the craft being taught" (249). But, clearly, these markers are relatively unimportant to both Murray and Elbow in their views of the writer-teacher and the teacher-writer in composition. Murray likes to suggest that teachers publish, but here is the point with which I take issue: "the level of publication is not as important as the experience of publication" (249). Elbow too devalues markers that are of critical importance to creative writers. For instance, in chapter 11 of *Writing with Power*, "Poetry as No Big Deal," Elbow admits that he writes from a position that makes it of little importance to him as a teacher to be a strong and established writer: "I write here as a non-poet, that is, someone who enjoyed trying to write profound poems as an adolescent, got over it when introduced to sophistication, and then restricted himself to writing a birthday poem to a loved one about every seven years." This view represents an attitude about creative writing that I believe separates those who are writer-teachers from those who are teacher-writers. Indeed, in composition studies the writer-teacher is often something altogether different, more accurately identified as the teacher-writer rather than writer-teacher, but may still work from a pragmatic orientation toward experience, reflection, and teaching nonetheless.

McPoem = The Poetic Mode: Some Further Thoughts on the Writer-Teacher and the Teacher-Writer

Elbow, of course, is correct. Anyone can write a poem, so why be afraid of it? But his contention opens another area of concern that I believe has blurred the writer-teacher status with the teacher-writer status. My contention is simply that several important figures in composition studies (Elbow, Bishop, and Art Young) have conflated what James Britton called "the poetic function of language" with poetry itself. To make this point and further elucidate the distinction between the writer-teacher and the teacher-writer, I will discuss two important essays, Donald Hall's "Poetry and Ambition" and Arthur Young's "Considering Values: The Poetic Function of Language."

I believe that Hall in this essay was among the first to articulate in some convincing way how the writing we think of as creative changed in the academic environment to become less "literary." Indeed, academic creative writing in 1983, when Hall wrote about it, was not literary writing the way we have historically thought of it. It may even be disingenuous to say creative writing has continued to be less literary since then, more democratic but less literary.

Hall's most famous indictment of academic creative writing programs and the one I want to focus on here is the production by students of the McPoem, a kind of writing seemingly unique to university workshops. Hall writes: "We write and

publish the McPoem – *ten billion served* – which becomes our contribution to the history of literature as the Model T is our contribution to a history which runs from bare feet past elephant and rickshaw to the vehicles of space" (3). Many of us have publicly bemoaned the inevitable outcome of our workshops: "workshop poems" or "workshop stories." This concern, to me, only underscores the fact that we have not yet learned how to respond to student creative writing without appropriating it, thus making it sound like our own writing.[2] If this fact is not bad enough, consciously or not, many of us routinely reward our students for their effort to make their writing sound like ours. Hall describes this problem: "The McPoem is the product of workshops of Hamburger University." And what is the consequence of that fact? Hall writes, "every year, Ronald McDonald takes the Pulitzer." Well, this *is* a problem you might rightly think we would have solved by now, during the intervening 30 years, using our collective wisdom. But in our efforts to democratize creative writing, making it, in Hall's words, "subject to the least common denominator," with the goal of attracting by doing so large numbers of undergraduate and graduate students to our courses, we have forgotten about the quality of writing, about whether a given piece written by a student of ours will ever find its place among all other poems ever written. Or, if that writing *should* indeed find its place, at what cost to the individual and to literature generally? Hall saw this problem as a predictable one in capitalist-driven society. I see it, as I explain below, as an instance of the (com)positioning of creative writing, a product of the university's confusion between poetry, as Hall thinks of it, and James Britton's poetic function of language, as it is employed in composition studies (Britton et al.).

Hall's solution in 1983 to the inevitable decline in the quality of literature produced in the academy was to "Abolish the M.F.A.!" Why? He answers, "The workshop schools us to produce the McPoem . . ." Many causes for the McPoem and the diminishment of literary writing in the academy have been identified, but I want to focus briefly on one, the impact of theory on literary writing in the academy because its effect, importantly, has been in large part to justify changes in what we construe writing to be. Among other things, literature's turn to theory – including composition theory – during the 1980s and 1990s threatened the well-being of the otherwise pure poet, contamination less apt to occur if poets had not made the university their home.

Art Young begins by saying the following, not surprisingly echoing in some ways the compositionist perspective of Elbow:

> Somewhere along the line, I think about sixth grade, our system of mass education gives up on creative writing as a useful learning experience. The rationale seems to be that true proficiency in creative writing is a gift from the gods given to the inspired few who are predestined to become great artists no matter what their educational experience, and that further opportunities for everyone else to write poetically serves no useful purpose. ("Considering Values," 77)

I contend that what Professor Young refers to in this passage is not poetry as Hall uses the term, but the poetic function of language, a theory that replaces experience. Young goes on to defend the poetic function rightly and logically as a mode of learning. Young writes, "poetic language helps students assess knowledge in terms of their own systems of belief" (78). Yes, but in the next sentence he clarifies what he means by "poetic language." Young explains, accurately paraphrasing Britton: "Poetic writing in its most familiar and completed forms is what most of us would recognize as, among other things, poetry, stories, plays and parables."

Now let's briefly contrast Hall's view of the poet as unique and ambitious talent with Young's position that advocates institutionalizing creative writing – that is, using creative writing for academic purposes such as writing to learn. Young, better than anyone who has written, enthusiastically interpreted and advocated the theories of James Britton. Young's advocacy of Britton's expressive function of language made writing across the curriculum, especially in its writing-to-learn function, plausible in many universities across the country. The similar case Young makes for use of the poetic mode for purposes of learning was new at the time and provocative. But, in the end, he conflated the poetic function of language with the writing of poetry and the uses of creative writing in an effort to democratize creative writing: poem as McPoem. One outcome of this confusion is that creative writing has thus been used by a variety of composition theorists to further advance the cause of composition studies. Again, this is what I mean by (com)positioning creative writing.

No doubt Young understood Britton to mean by the poetic function various forms of writing, including but not limited to poetry itself. Appropriating the informal use of these genres, including poetry, for purposes of student learning is a wonderful idea Young later employs successfully at Clemson University. But the (com)positioning of creative writing – that is, the intentional use of creative writing to institutionalize it as a component of composition studies – has as a by-product the institutionalizing of creative writing as well, an effort that caused Hall to call for taking creative writing out of the academy altogether, preventing the trend toward making creative writing a democratic enterprise, more like composition than like the writing of a Dante, to use Hall's example. Young continues: "All teachers, of course, need not become creative writing teachers in some formal sense, but all teachers from all disciplines can elicit creative language – and thus creative thinking – from students" (78).

The central issue concerning the writer-teacher in the US, as it would be anywhere, is what we mean by writer. As a poet myself, I do not think we should give the title poet or writer just because someone asks for it. Instead, I believe a writer is a writer because of certain measurable experiences, as I've argued. To that end, then, the writer-teacher is a pragmatist who is known as a writer and conveys a pedagogy that reflects what has been learned by writing. Too much creative writing in the university resembles the poetic function of language rather than poems in the tradition of Dante, for instance. And this division has been the source of some conflict between creative writing's biggest advocates in this country, the Conference on College Composition and Communication and the Associated Writers and Writing Programs.

NOTES

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1   Elbow describes his predicament in "Illiteracy at Oxford and Harvard."

2   See my *Responding to Student Poems* for elaboration on this idea.

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28

Creative Writing to the Future

Graeme Harper

Aspects of the Past

For thousands of years human beings have been engaging in creative writing, as an art and as a mode of communication. Not all cultures have done so at the same time, or with equal interest, but almost all have done so in some way and at some time. Other art forms have not always found such widespread interest or favor; though some of course, such as music, have seen similar long-term global appearances and similar long-term enthusiasm.

Thinking of our human practice of writing simply as an act or acts of inscription, of inscribing words, it could be said that creative writing has been considered as inscription in words that has been creatively enhanced in some way or ways. For this reason, our attention in discussing creative writing has most often turned to the word "creative" and ideas about creative writing have focused on how public artifacts of creative writing – those written works that emerge into public view in one form or another, a poem, a novel, a scripted dramatic work – have related to elements of human creativity and how other written forms, mostly other publicly available works, haven't (in some way, because they have been considered "less creative," at least by inference).

Certain aspects have been missing from such an approach to creative writing. For example, if we've been talking about creative writing surely we have been talking about the human acts and actions that are entailed in creative writing, not almost

exclusively talking about some of its results? Or have we? Alternatively, if it has been primarily certain public artifacts of creative writing that we've been discussing, in what ways have we really been discussing human activities at all? Are there different periods, and difference places in the world, where it is the activities of creative writing that have been more focal, and other places where it is certain artifacts emerging from our human creative actions that have been more focal to our discussions and our thoughts?

Set out here are some potential future directions, and some thoughts about how creative writing's future might look. But the right way to begin to explore the future is almost certainly by turning briefly to the past as it impacts on the present. Most importantly, we need to recognize that although creative writing has been undertaken for many centuries, our consideration of it has been strongly molded by our relatively recent history. In fact, the arts, generally, are considered today in a way that was defined by the emergence and promotion of the industries and enterprise of culture in the modern period from the mid-1700s onward. In this we can incorporate both private and public enterprise; and we can see similar ways of thinking in avenues as diverse as commerce, education, and governmental policy.

John Brewer, in his book *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, makes a strong case for the emergence of our current thinking in changes seen in the eighteenth century. He writes:

> magnificent works of art, writings about the nature of poetry and painting and ideas about beauty and sublimity all existed before the eighteenth century . . . But until the eighteenth century they had not been treated as a whole, with theatre, music, literature and painting given a special collective identity. (xvi)

Creative writing, and the idea of someone being defined as a "creative writer," comes about today because of how the eighteenth century produced notions about the activity itself and about its results. The grouping of "the arts" together in the way Brewer outlines, and their positioning within society as increasingly commercial cultural contributions, high or low, associating the high cultural in particular with the development of critical schools of literary scholarship, and developing a contingent of commercial and literary gatekeepers – all this was a result of changes brought about by the first and then second industrial revolutions, mid-eighteenth century and then mid-nineteenth century, feeding concepts of commercial and cultural value, critical and popular reception, and even aspects of communal and personal identity.

There was a time, certainly an ancient notion seen in many cultures, where being involved in creative practices was simply part of day-to-day human life, and the concept of differentiating someone on the basis of them being called "an artist" or "a creative writer" would have been as strange as it would have been useless. But the eighteenth century brought forth a new spirit of industrial, mercantile, commercial thinking in Europe, and soon beyond. How we came to see creative writing (or, at least, conduct our primary discussions of its publicly available artifacts) was informed

by this emerging ideal. As Brewer explains in relation to British publishing and Shakespeare's texts:

> The London book trade, cautious, conservative, yet keenly interested in elevating the writers it "owned," produced a succession of quality editions, and they generally promoted the sense that Britain had a small, well-defined pantheon of literary deities, whose minders would ensure that they did not stray into the wrong hands. (480)

The question of where to begin when thinking about the future for creative writing is a considerable one, and one that is worthy of a much longer exploration. However, there are also a number of reasons for the urgency of undertaking this exploration, and for summarizing it here. These reasons can be grounded with two points.

First, as rapid change happens (the pace of change in our contemporary world, for example) it is easy to lose sight of continuities, and to lose a sense of the connective tissues of past to present and future. Second, because creative writing occurs today on several levels of human engagement, as a way of creating and investigating the personal and public world, as an aspect of a commercial or industrial enterprise (in the contemporary world, for example: publishing, performance industries, the media), as a component of other communities (from creative writing undertaken for personal well-being, personal or community growth to creative writing in education), then considering it involves keeping the network of connections and developments clearly in mind.

John Brewer is right to focus our attention toward the revolutions seen in the eighteenth century. Whatever continuities remained – despite these revolutionary changes – related best to something other than the public artifacts of creative writing, but were also themselves likely to be subject to the influences of changing attitudes and ways of thinking, to evolving ideals in education, the community and in popular perception. So it is here in the second decade of the twenty-first century that although we can point to likely aspects of the future, as informed by changes of the present, we can also point to continuities that will themselves bear evidence of the period through which we are living.

New Technologies of the Late Twentieth Century

Though many significant technological developments of course occurred in the 250–300 years prior to the final decade of the twentieth century, creative writing was essentially subject to the same centralized analog world we had occupied since the eighteenth century, until that final twentieth-century decade. That earlier world was one where creative writing was made in relative isolation from readers, and distributed via physical bookstores (or theaters, or cinemas, for that matter) to readers (or audiences) who received it largely on completion and responded to it largely as an object, a physical commodity produced, rather than as an experience with which they were

directly engaged. Creative writing was, in that sense, popularly represented most often by its commercial or cultural commodity value, its physical manifestation in publicly available objects. By the time we entered the latter years of the final decade of the twentieth century that was no longer the case. Many of the emerging technologies of the period instituted modes of human exchange that began to substantially change the relationship between humans "creating" and the creative artifacts that emerge from such creating. Those associated with the world wide web and the mobile/cell phone are key examples.

Since the final decade of the twentieth century, it has become possible for creative writers to communicate with their readers at the very moment they are writing, on or through the same device on which they are writing if they wish, and with relative ease. It is possible now for them to talk about their work as it is progressing (and display this "work-in-progress" to potentially millions of other people along the way, if they wish), and also to "publish" it when and where they like (either electronically or traditionally or by a combination of methods). Choice is a concept and condition that is being actively enhanced in our time! The word "publish" itself has been newly recreated, sometimes incorporating aspects of moving image and sound, but still situated somewhat uncomfortably between established ideas about what constitutes a "published work" and new ideas about what opportunities exist for moving from something created to receiving something created. Using these new technologies it is possible to draw readers to created works; or, indeed, create multiple versions of their creative works that arrive in the public sphere incomplete or complete, in many guises or in one guise supported by many avenues of dissemination.

Tools Support Products

Technologies at their basic core are simply human tools, of any kind. Notably, however, technologies impact on the way in which we act and think. They even influence how we feel. We only have to look back at the impact of the telephone on human conceptions of space and time, and on our feelings about these too. Once it became possible to speak directly and "live" to someone who was not in the immediate vicinity then feelings about what constitutes human interaction, ideals of human bonding, and the future of locating and maintaining friendships and families were changed. Those are just a few examples of the impact. When air travel made it possible to be in a location on the other side of the world in one day rather than several weeks, ideas about how the world was connected were naturally affected. Humans being humans, this does not mean that all technological changes simply go ahead and produce positive results. But changes come about, positive or negative, nevertheless.

Over the past few hundred years we've seen a concentration on the commodities of creative writing, not really on the activities that are creative writing, despite how

much those activities have been highlighted in educational settings as well as in other places such as local communities, or sometimes even in special professional interest groups (creative nonfiction writers, for example) working in shared settings. This has not necessarily been a lack of realization of what creative writing is as a human practice, but it has certainly been a bias in how it has been publicly represented. We can point to the evolution of a consumer culture based mostly on material exchange, from the eighteenth century onward, as a key reason for this bias.

Similarly, we have seen creative writing defined mostly *after* it is done – that is, in its artifacts – rather than *when* it is being done. So we have seen certain ideals concerned with cultural industries and cultural heritage emphasize not the activities of creative writing themselves but selected representational artifacts (mostly final works and mostly only those by certain writers linked to the operations of the publishing or performance industries). This is not to be critical of those aspects of the commerce of cultural enterprise; but it is to say that published or performed works of creative writing are the very tip of the iceberg of what creative writing is and what we humans do with it, why we do it, and what emerges from doing it (all the results, the entirely noncommercial as well as the commercial).

Creative Writing is often investigated as an individual or personal activity by creative writers; but it is more important as a cultural activity to creative industries companies (for example, those connected with publishing, drama, film and the media). In essence, though, it is of course both, both individual activity and cultural activity. The future of Creative Writing, always combining changes in individual senses of the world with changes in political economy, cultural shape, forms and structures of society combined with psychologies and dispositions of persons, will come about because of a network of relationships between individuals and culture.

The impact of new contemporary modes of communication (and, indeed, new modes of art and artistic practice), arriving in the final decade of the twentieth century, intriguingly works also to highlight the origins of creative writing, the human context of creative writing and, most significantly, possibly the future for creative writing too. It might be predicted that if these new technologies are showing more creative writing as it is happening, and more creative works that are not reliant on the relatively centralized mechanisms of commercial publishers or physical bookstores, then the future of creative writing will see more reference to the activities of creative writing and to the noncommercial outcomes of doing it as well as references to what we currently see as its primary final results.

Books and Bookstores

One aspect of the future of creative writing relates to the avenues available for its exchange – between writers and readers, or more broadly between writers and audiences, between creative writers and other creative writers. So, indeed, there is

absolutely no doubt that the technologies of the world wide web and, increasingly, of mobile telephony have been changing our ways of conducting these exchanges. But for a good few centuries bookstores have formed significant hubs for such exchanges too, especially in relation to the works of prose writers, poets, and writers of creative nonfiction, of course, and it would appear that increasingly now, and certainly in the near future, traditional physical bookstores will exist only in small numbers, if at all, and not necessarily as key hubs in such exchanges.

This suggestion might be an overly pessimistic view. No truly definitive result is yet in sight. Bookstores have shifted in recent years, much as cinemas have shifted likewise, to take on additional roles as venues for general entertainment and social-izing. Paradoxically, this is just as much a turn to the past as it is a movement toward the future. The notion of books as a focus for coffee shop conversation or conversations in bars and pubs harks back to the foundation of audiences for novels and biographies, for example the discussions generated at the birth of modernity when certain new forms of literature found themselves the focus of a new social excitement. Today, however, the bookstore, much like the cinema, is competing to attract consumers out of their homes where convenience, lower cost and greater choice keep previous on-site customers happily off-site, purchasing electronically.

Of course, other technologies have fed this movement. The market for e-books has grown at a considerable rate in recent years, and the simplicity of delivery of e-books into the personal lives of readers has grown along with the expectations of readers, who have grown used to high quality moving images, deeper richer sound and inter-active options as part of their general media experiences. Mobile telephony, supported by the greater delivery speeds now available, the wider networks of service, and a general sense of the youthful vigor in adopting or adapting to the new mobile tech-nology world have all contributed to questions about the future of the physical book-store. It is difficult to imagine such a bricks and mortar place really surviving in the longer term; and today, even to imagine the existence of bookstores when the next generation reaches adulthood seems at very least naive.

And yet, one additional thought might occur to us at this point. If creative writing is increasingly taught in our schools and universities, and if more and more people are continuing to higher levels of education, and if something about creative writing involves some physical, material results, might it be that there will be in our future some kind of enterprise where creative writing, the results of creative writing, and an interest in exploring creative writing brings about a "creative writing store" – books of various kinds, electronic as well as paper-based, connected social activities, opportunities for exploring both creative writing itself and the results of creative writing?

Perhaps choice will inform such a thing, our increased emphasis on consumer and lifestyle choice; and the aesthetic, tactile enjoyment that many find in such objects as the hardback book will be available alongside reading experiences, discussions and opportunities for personal discovery. We are increasingly living in a world where we connect through experiences, something I have called "synaptic"[1] after the activities

of synapses, transmission junctions between one activity and another, one part of our lives and another. Something on which to speculate!

Creative Writing and Education

Throughout the twentieth century the growth of creative writing courses in universities and colleges brought to the fore many ideas about how creative writing might be taught and learnt. Creative writing has been in universities since higher education was first begun. It might be said Plato's academy, founded over 2,000 years ago, contained creative writing in that creative explorations of various philosophical topics are certainly known to have been part of the Platonic academy. But in considering this we naturally approach questions of where and how we can define "creative" writing as being different enough to other forms of writing to be defined as such; and we encounter questions of when and how we did begin to define it this way. The word "creative" is not really that old[2] – at least in how it has been used to talk about humans creating, what we might call "secular creation," and if creative writing existed prior to when it would have been defined as such would we still consider it creative writing? It seems logical that we would. In which case, creative writing has always been in and around education.

What has changed, and what has drawn most attention, is the growth of the more formal presence of creative writing in named courses offered particularly in colleges and in universities. In North America, in Europe, particularly in the United Kingdom, in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific, increasingly in Asia and in Africa, creative writing is formally appearing more in universities than ever before. At least it is appearing *formally* more than ever before; it could well be that the same story prevails in the history of higher education around the world, and it is certainly the case that this history needs writing so that we can identify the ways in which creative writing has been part of our educational environments, and so that we can compare the origins and aspects of particular elements of creative writing practice.

At present, there are considerations to guide some thoughts about the future. Some in education (and, indeed, outside of it) continue to ask if creative writing can actually be taught, believing more that it can only be introduced to those studying it, and then coaxed and enhanced through a version of mentorship and/or apprenticeship. Yet the offering of more formal courses in creative writing continues to grow in tertiary education – so it might be that this contradictory situation will form the basis of some important discussions, and perhaps even be resolved as we move further into the twenty-first century.

Beside whether it can be taught, the future offers many opportunities to explore how creative writing might be learnt? What, for example, is the relationship between nurture and nature – that is, does the creative writer really arrive "preordained" or is she or he the product of certain educative actions, whatever those might be? The answer might be more obvious if we had agreement on whether

creative writing can be taught, and which components of learning and teaching are more important But at present we don't have agreement on those things. If creative writing can at very least be undertaken, and perhaps even understood to a reasonable degree, by almost everyone, what can be clarified as different levels of educational achievement in creative writing? At present, within national arenas and globally, we see considerable differences of achievement and expectation, of formal qualifications and of informal considerations. It might be that there is no universal answer to this question, but if creative writing continues to grow in educational settings, the future is likely to see those working in education exploring these questions even more.

Of course, we might ask whether it will continue to grow. Has there been something about the period starting around the mid-twentieth century and continuing till now that has been particularly encouraging of creative writing in education? Without trying to go beyond being farsighted and into the realm of omniscience, what might be some of the factors that will encourage creative writing in education and some that might see it lose ground? Sometimes it has been said that the increased emphasis on visual culture, on the visual media, on film, television, computer games, has not been to literature's advantage. This might be true, but creative writing has been part of that at least as much as it has been challenged by it, and the weight of evidence probably suggests that it has benefited overall. It could be, also, that certain end results of our creative writing will disappear from education, as we embrace new forms of art and new forms and styles of communication. Recently, in some parts of the world, mobile phone "novels" have gained some popularity. Definitions of what constitutes creative writing have changed over time, and such definitions are unlikely ever to become fixed.

Evidence suggests, then, that although the future will incorporate new practices and new outcomes for creative writing, the acts and actions that are creative writing itself will continue, as it has continued in various ways for thousands of years. With this in mind, it is equally likely that creative writing will continue to be part of education and it is highly likely that the growth in formal courses and classes in creative writing, a growth we have seen in the relatively recent period of creative writing's history, will impact upon how we view creative writing in the future.

Revising the Present

Worldwide, libraries, museums and many kinds of archives display evidence of the acts and actions of creative writers. Often these have as their focal point final works, published works, works that have been performed or screened, or otherwise sent into the public sphere. Other times – for reasons connected with the historical contexts of cultural heritage, most often – they are what can be called "pre-creative writing," "complementary creative writing" and "post-creative writing" (that is, evidence that

emerges before, during, or after the creation of disseminated works of creative writing). Most of time these are works of only a small portion of people who actually are engaged with creative writing.

As notions of what constitutes engagement in and dissemination of creative writing have changed so, to a certain extent, has what constitutes evidence of creative writing. This will continue, and probably expand in scope. In addition, how we value the evidence of creative writing as human activity will need to be revisited alongside this, often, in order for this valuing to keep pace with how human intention and meaning relate to changes in human actions. Valuing bears the marks of history and context. Valuing creative writing means valuing and understanding its evidence trail, and what this represents. None of that is without cultural, economic, or even educational influence and bias.

Creative writing is still today seen most often seen as something undertaken in order to produce cultural and/or commercial artifacts. But if it is a human activity that not only consists of many activities and many artifacts but that exists most strongly as an activity in the memories and perceptions of creative writers, then we might ask right now how we undertake creative writing, and how we understand the way creative writing relates to how we remember and perceive our own lives and the lives of others.

New knowledge in, and about creative writing, can come about when we begin to better engage with it as a lithe meeting of the personal and the cultural. Along with this, when, too, we begin to answer questions of how we have conducted, and now conduct, our many human exchanges; exchanges with each other, with the world around us, and with the personal, social, cultural, and even the political and economic conditions of our imaginings.

A perhaps overly optimistic view might suggest that the future of creative writing could easily be determined, first, by how we approach it as creative writers and, second, by how we receive it in our daily lives. Neither of these things is fixed in time or place, but both are informed by how creative writing occupies us as both art form and communication. A less perfect but perhaps more realistic view would be that the full truth of our human love of creative writing, the dimensions of our participation in it, our reasons for doing it for such a long time, and our appreciation of many of its results and of its intentions, might be revealed more as we progress into the twenty-first century; but that many other factors will also play a role in how the future of creative writing looks, in how we can involve ourselves in it, and in what we come to expect from it and ourselves as we participate in it.

Engaging in and Responding to the Future

One way to conclude this chapter and, indeed, this book, would be to simply include some blank pages on which readers could write their own thoughts on the future of

creative writing – perhaps even do some creative writing of your own, and include it here in this book as a form of reply or response or, indeed, creative participation in the whole thing. Because creative writing is such an incredibly human activity, and because one of the important points about this is recognizing our widespread undertaking of it, that would seem a perfect way to encourage creative writers to explore the future of creative writing, and such exploration could be nothing but productive. However, there is a good chance someone would return this book for a refund if we took that route! So, an alternative but hopefully no less encouraging way of rounding up follows.

Expectations often drive our ways of dealing with the world. We wake each morning with certain commonsense expectations. We continue through our days likewise. Many times our expectations – at least our commonsense ones! – are met. Sometimes our expectations exceed reality. Other times they fall short. Rather than concluding with blank pages or with a set of predictions, then, I'll conclude here with a set of expectations. We're familiar with such things, so let's use this familiarity to our advantage.

The expectations that follow take on board the fact that common sense, or more accurately perhaps utilitarian sense, has a good chance of approaching some truths. But these expectations are also listed with the knowledge that some of them will be exceeded and some will fall short. This all seems infinitely more useful, nevertheless, than suggesting a foresight so profound that it might appear to overcome the reality of our diverse explorations, attempts and celebrations of the activities of creative writing. In the future, therefore, these things look reasonably certain:

1   The number of people involved in creative writing will continue to rise, globally, and with greater ease of communication, ease of translation and thus opportunities exchange of experiences and of results, creative writing will become even more embraced than it is now.

2   Education in creative writing, and the evolution of this education, will mean more people will speak about creative writing from the point of view of having engaged with it at all levels of education, and educational opportunities for creative writing will continue to evolve.

3   Aspects of undertaking of creative writing will become more prominent as the technologies allowing for more direct, simple and regular communication between those of us undertaking it will allow more exchange of the activities, and the experiences of creative writing as well as the results of doing it will be part of our cultural and personal landscapes.

4   Some of things we have known as the primary outcomes of undertaking creative writing – some of the forms, genre, styles of end result – will not continue as they are, but will be replaced by new forms. Some forms will continue and, just as in each generation that has gone before, they will be influenced by events, cycles and attitudes that emerge.

5   Cultural institutions, seeing the growth of new personal exchanges focused on the acts and actions of creative writing, will begin to incorporate far more evidence of these from a wider range of people and in a wider range of circumstances. Questions of representation, evidence and value will arise and have to be decided upon.

6   More people than ever will see their works of creative writing exchanged with readers, audiences, other writers. While the commercial world of publishing, media and performance will adjust to the changing nature of things, alternatives to that world will grow and questions of how to adjust business models will result in a wider, choice-driven landscape for those interested in creative writing and works of creative writing.

7   The idea of responding to creative writing will gain more breadth and depth as a wider variety of evidence of it will be available, generally, and more people will be able to respond to its undertaking as well as its commercial results.

8   That word "creative" will continue to be examined and, with the increasing array of creative writing that is difficult to see primarily as inscription but of a "creative" kind, further work will be undertaken to consider the human being as creative creature and to examine how creativity forms part of our general engagement with the world.

9   The tools for creative writing will increase in number and choice and as each tool is applied, used and developed, new thoughts will emerge as to how creative writing can be undertaken and what results can be achieved.

10 As we progress through the twenty-first century, the imagination will continue to provide great "pleasures," as John Brewer once wrote of the eighteenth century. But the compartments, the divisions, that defined the emerging eighteenth-century sense of the arts will finally evolve into a more open sense of human creative practices. With interaction, exchange, fluidity of movement as a twenty-first century mode of acting and understanding, creative writing will be better seen as part of a collaborative exchange of many human creative activities.

You will sense a degree of anticipation in these ideas, a projection of possibility. So I'll come clean on that front. What I'm suggesting is largely positive and, for certain, my anticipation of the future of creative writing is one that begins with an anticipation of how exciting and vibrant that future will be. Of course, I might be wrong; but our history, and the length and scope of our history of creative writing, suggest otherwise.

NOTES

1   My forthcoming book, *The Future for Creative Writing*, explores these ideas further.

2   "It tends to amaze people . . . that the first recorded use in English of the abstract noun 'creativity' is as recent as 1875" (Pope 2).

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