

The Future of Creative Writing

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Originating in American universities in the early part of the twentieth century, Creative Writing has undergone an international expansion since the 1990s. Creative Writing programmes continue to grow in popularity despite perennial scepticism about their pedagogical value and their academic rigour, and despite their seemingly anomalous position within the modern research university. Perhaps an inevitable corollary of this expansion is the fact that Creative Writing has now become an object of scholarly enquiry, emerging in the new millennium as a distinct field of academic research.

It is no longer possible for Creative Writing to maintain its romantic ideal of a garret in the ivory tower, a community of writers made possible by the patronage of the university. And it is not sufficient to define Creative Writing pedagogy as the passing down of a guild craft from established practitioners to a new generation of writers. Writing programmes now exist in an intellectual environment of interdisciplinarity, critical self-reflection and oppositional politics on the one hand, and in an institutional environment of learning outcomes, transferable skills and competitive research funding on the other. What effects will this academic environment have on how the subject is taught, and on the creative work produced? This is the crucial question confronting teachers of writing in the New Humanities.

An object of study

For much of its history, formal reflection on Creative Writing has been largely restricted to writing handbooks which recast the evaluative and taxonomic language of formalist criticism in the 'practical' language of craft and technique, backed up by dilettantish musing on the creative process and the question of whether writing can be taught. Some critical commentary on the subject emerged in the 1980s, but this tended to be hostile rather than investigative, bemoaning the absorption of mainstream literary culture into the academy, and blaming writing programmes for the mediocre state of contemporary American literature.

While anxieties about the effects of Creative Writing on literary culture still exist, from the 1990s there has been a massive increase in scholarly material written about the pedagogical strategies and institutional location of writing programmes. Commentary on Creative Writing has become much more sophisticated and academic in focus, animated

by self-reflexive theoretical and historical enquiry into the discipline and focusing on how to understand its place within the modern university. Handbooks continue to flourish, but the refereed journal article, the academic conference paper, even the scholarly book, now accompany creative work as regular publications produced by Creative Writing departments. The discipline of Creative Writing has become a growth area of academic research in America, and even more so in Australia and the UK where writing programmes proliferated in the last decade of the twentieth century.

TEXT, the electronic journal for the Australian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP), has published refereed articles about Creative Writing since its establishment in 1997. *New Writing: The International Journal for the Theory and Practice of Creative Writing* was launched in 2004 through the UK Centre for Creative Writing Research Through Practice. American scholarly journals such as *College English* and *Pedagogy* continue to publish articles on Creative Writing. There are several international conferences on Creative Writing held annually, including AAWP conferences in Australia, and Great Writing conferences in the UK. And the discipline now has its own institutional histories to accompany those of English and Composition which proliferated in the 1980s. D. G. Myers' *The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880* appeared in 1996, providing a comprehensive historical account of the emergence of Creative Writing in American universities. My own book, *Creative Writing and the New Humanities*, was published in 2005 and provides an international account of the disciplinary history, theoretical underpinnings and pedagogical future of Creative Writing.

There are now sufficient key texts and identifiable debates, with specific national differences, to justify the existence of a field of 'Creative Writing Studies' within which academics can establish a research profile, and which can be packaged and taught to students. What happened in the 1990s to promote the emergence of this field? By this stage in history the intellectual paradigm shift of knowledge in the humanities produced by the rise of Theory had effected permanent disciplinary changes within English studies. In his 1993 book, *Cultural Capital*, John Guillory pointed out that the word 'theory', while most commonly associated with deconstruction, is a 'unifying name of manifestly heterogenous critical practices', but the *name* of theory is 'a sign both defining and defined by a syllabus of texts' (Guillory 1993: 177). This 'canon of theory', comprising 'master theorists' such as Derrida and Foucault, now supplements the traditional literary canon in graduate school curricula, as both an area of specialisation and a way to provide new methods for reading literary works. Guillory's argument is that Theory represents the technobureaucratic knowledge of a new professional-managerial class, replacing literature as the cultural capital of the old bourgeoisie. Conflict over 'opening up' the literary canon, which Guillory argues wrongly conflates literary representation with political representation, is merely symptomatic of this crisis in the cultural capital of literature itself. Whether or not one agrees with this assessment, the very existence of Guillory's argument demonstrates the extent to which Theory had flourished in the academy. In other words, by the 1990s it could not be ignored.

The challenge of theory

By the time Guillory's book had been published it is noticeable that discussions about Creative Writing in America had shifted from concerns about the effects of writing programmes on literary culture to concerns about the division between Creative Writing and Theory within the academy, and this is precisely because of the influence of the Theory

canon on graduate school education. In a 1986 review article Marjorie Perloff argued that conflict in American poetry between the conservative mainstream and a postmodern avant-garde is one that takes place 'largely within the academy', a battle 'between the Creative Writing Workshop and the Graduate Seminar in Theory' (Perloff 1986: 45). The fact that Perloff's characterisation of the 'A Team' workshop versus the 'B Team' seminar is one of the most-quoted lines in Creative Writing criticism demonstrates the extent to which a recognition of this institutional division set the tone for subsequent analyses of the relationship between the emerging discipline of Creative Writing and the increasingly dominant influence of critical Theory.

There was good reason for Perloff's characterisation of this divide. The classic critique of Creative Writing from the position of critical Theory is Donald Morton and Mas'ud Zavarzadeh's notorious 1989 article, 'The cultural politics of the fiction writing workshop'. In this tiresome rehashing of theoretical dogma, the authors criticise writing programmes for their outmoded neo-romantic belief in authorial 'voice' as the unmediated expression of selfhood, and the complicity of this belief with the ideology of the capitalist state. What is at stake in this caricature of the writing workshop is, as Guillory might say, the cultural capital of literature versus that of Theory. The article can be seen as a justification for setting the 'canon of Theory' on reading lists in the writing workshop as well as the graduate seminar, implying that writers are themselves unequipped to understand how literature really works, and that their craft requires explication by master theorists:

The creative writing student who knows theory and who has read Marx, Lacan, Foucault, Lenin, Kristeva, Derrida, Gramsci, Heidegger, Cixous, Deleuze, Althusser, Luxemburg, Adorno will not approach the workshop with the same naïveté or accept its orthodoxies as will the student who has read the traditional syllabus of the literature department, which is entirely composed of poems, novels and stories. (Morton and Zavarzadeh 1988–9: 169–70)

By and large, the industry of critical Theory has not been concerned with Creative Writing, and it would be easy to dismiss Morton and Zavarzadeh's critique as an exercise in professional aggrandisement were it not for the fact that their basic criticisms of the workshop have been shared by many teachers of Creative Writing themselves. In the 1989 anthology, *Creative Writing in America: Theory and Pedagogy*, Eve Shelnutt articulated a frustration with the culture of anti-intellectualism within writing programmes, and this chapter has been regularly cited as a clarion call for a productive dialogue with Theory. The subsequent increase of interest in Creative Writing as an international field of academic research has largely come from within, and has resulted precisely from the discipline's formal engagement with Theory. This engagement has tended to see Creative Writing and Theory as incommensurable discourses, dramatising the professional divisions between these two areas as a series of intellectual binary oppositions (between practice and theory, creativity and criticism, writing and reading) which need to be negotiated. For instance, in the 1992 British anthology, *Teaching Creative Writing: Theory and Practice*, Robert Miles wrote: 'I believe that at bottom there is an irreducible tension between the manoeuvres of contemporary theory and the practice of teaching writing' (Miles 1992: 36).

In responding to this 'irreducible tension', some commentators have provided staunch resistance to the intellectual challenges and aggrandising critiques of literature offered by the 'fashions' of Theory, even positing Creative Writing as an antidote to the disciplinary malaise wrought by Theory, the last place for the art of literature to be appreciated as English departments are absorbed by Cultural Studies (see Fenza 2000; Green 2003).

Many teachers argue, however, that drawing upon the insights of Theory is necessary to 'demystify' the Creative Writing workshop, not simply as an exercise in criticism (such as Morton and Zavarzadeh's essay which approaches the workshop as a 'text' to be read against the grain) but as part of a genuine desire to reform the pedagogical practices of Creative Writing. Here the oppositional politics of Theory and the discourse of critical pedagogy are employed to challenge the commitment of writing programmes to a middle-class reading culture and a literary marketplace dominated by multinational publishers; and to uncover the 'false consciousness' of students, empowering them to develop a critically engaged and socially responsible awareness of their own work (see Amato and Fleisher 2001; Green 2001). Then there are those who argue that the writing workshop can establish a mutually profitable dialogue between literary practice and literary theory, introducing theoretical debates to workshop discussions which, in turn, offers a practical interrogation of Theory, thus establishing a formal pedagogical link between the two (see Cooley 2003; Newlyn and Lewis 2003).

These approaches rely on a rhetoric of opposition between Creative Writing and critical Theory, perpetuating this opposition as the very premise of their argument even as they seek to negotiate or collapse it. This rhetoric has been a necessary part of disciplinary self-exploration, but it will quickly become tiresome if taken as the basis for 'reforming' Creative Writing or 'integrating' the subject with literary studies. There are only so many times a teacher can use the workshop to stage debates about the 'death of the author', intertextuality, reader-response theory, identity politics, canonicity, etc. This is similar to the difficulties associated with Gerald Graff's suggestion, in *Beyond the Culture Wars* (1992), of 'teaching the conflicts' in relation to disciplinary debates within English studies: teachers find themselves compelled constantly to revisit the canon debate each time they teach the classics, maintaining a kind of polemical stasis.

As a response to the culture wars, Creative Writing studies has reconfigured literature from an artistic tradition which students enter by producing their own writing, to a contested epistemological category within the modern academy which can be investigated by the pedagogy of Creative Writing itself. However, Creative Writing is not a subject in 'crisis', the solution to which is to 'teach the conflicts' between literary practice and critical Theory; it is a subject which has gained disciplinary identity precisely because a new generation of teachers who perceive themselves as writers *and* critics have engaged with Theory to reassert the cultural capital of literature as intellectual work in the New Humanities. Creative Writing is thus an exemplary discipline of the post-Theory academy.

The post-theory academy

The concept of an age of post-Theory does not imply that the intellectual fashion of post-modernism has passed through humanities departments and that we can now return to the traditional goal of upholding Western humanist culture. Theory has irrevocably changed the way in which research and teaching is conducted in the field of literary studies. To say that contemporary critical thought is post-Theory is to recognise that the age of Grand Theory or High Theory in the 1970s and 1980s has effected disciplinary changes which are now being worked through.

One of the promises of Theory, particularly that offered by structuralism, was the possibility of a unifying methodological approach to the study of literature which could address foundational questions about what constitutes an object of study within the discipline, and which could provide a rigorous method for reading texts of all descriptions, manifested

in exemplary fashion by the project of 're-reading' canonical works. In the 1990s, this grand enterprise of Theory fragmented and dispersed into diverse fields of enquiry: race studies, gender studies, postcolonial studies, media studies, etc. This is the result of both professional specialisation in an increasingly broad disciplinary field, and the pragmatic, localised and eclectic deployment of Theory within specific critical practices. Furthermore, a number of critics on the academic left have taken stock of the legacy of Theory, mindful that its radical promise can be dulled by institutional entrenchment. Post-Theory criticism in this sense is concerned with how politically-engaged criticism can operate in the modern university as well as agitate for social change. And it can be argued that the interdisciplinary enterprise of Cultural Studies has emerged as the post-Theory heir to English Studies. Indeed the slogan of the journal *Cultural Studies*, established in 1987, is 'Theorising politics, politicising theory'.

For me, the most significant and productive discussion of the post-Theory phenomenon is provided by Jeffrey Williams' 'The posttheory generation' ([1995] 2000). Williams' focus in this article is not on abstract debates but on the institutional conditions of criticism after the age of what he calls 'big theory'. For Williams the realities of 'a drastically reconfigured job market, pinched in the vice of a restructured and downsizing university' (25) are as important as the dispersion of Theory into various specialised studies, for this has influenced the orientation towards more modest and publicly accountable criticism which is being produced by 'the generation of intellectual workers who have entered the literary field and attained professional positions in the late 1980s and through the 1990s' (25). This posttheory generation, Williams asserts, has been educated in an academic climate governed by Theory and its 'hermeneutics of suspicion', but nonetheless possesses a sense of belatedness, of appearing after the revolutionary polemics of poststructuralism, Marxism and feminism became institutionally sanctioned as part of graduate school training and as a mark of professional attainment. 'In short, the posttheory generation was taught to *take theory* – not traditional scholarly methods, not normal practical criticism – *for granted*, and theory in turn provided a threshold stamp of professional value' (29).

Much of the research into Creative Writing as an academic discipline has been undertaken by members of this posttheory generation. According to Kelly Ritter: 'there is most certainly a generational divide between the pre-1980s hires in creative writing, most of whom hold the MA or MFA, and the current crop of new hires, many of whom will hold the MA or MFA and PhD' (2001: 216). In other words, Creative Writing students who have been exposed to the canon of Theory in the graduate school curriculum are now theorising their own discipline. According to Patrick Bizarro, there are several stages which Creative Writing has gone through in its emergence as an academic discipline in America: investigation into how the subject is taught; contextualisation of the subject in relation to other subjects in English studies, particularly composition; then, 'once it became economically feasible and desirable to do so, a new advanced degree in creative writing, the PhD, was established' (2004: 308). Bizarro points out that the research conducted by graduates of PhD Creative Writing programmes has been the next stage in defining for Creative Writing its 'epistemological difference from other subjects' (308).

As I pointed out earlier, a major reason for the emergence of an international body of research into the discipline of Creative Writing is the development of writing programmes in Australian and English universities. Creative Writing shares a remarkably similar institutional trajectory in these two countries. Courses in Creative Writing were first taught in vocational institutions in the tertiary sector: Colleges of Advanced Education in Australia; and polytechnics in England. When these institutions entered the university system in

the early 1990s Creative Writing developed a large-scale presence, particularly at the postgraduate level.

What is significant about this history is that Creative Writing developed in both these countries *alongside* Theory and Cultural Studies as part of a challenge to traditional literary education. There is no long-standing tradition of Creative Writing in these countries which needed to be 'reformed', and no perceived contribution to an impoverishment or standardisation of literary culture. For instance, at the same time that Marjorie Perloff characterised an institutional divide between the A Team and the B Team in American graduate education, Ian Reid's 'The crisis in English Studies' (1982) and Colin McCabe's 'Broken English' (1986) argued that creative writing pedagogy could be enlisted in the *service* of Theory to interrogate the assumptions of traditional English studies.

By the time Creative Writing had attained a strong institutional presence and professional identity, the discourses of critical Theory had become embedded in university curricula and research output. And by making Creative Writing an object of critical scrutiny in order to establish its professional integrity as a new academic discipline, scholars in the field have been compelled to engage with prevailing modes of contemporary criticism. In other words, Creative Writing in Australia has developed its disciplinary identity *through* an engagement with Theory, rather than changing in *response* to it. In 2005, Jeri Kroll and Steve Evans commented that:

anyone engaged in criticism nowadays, in fact anyone contemplating a higher degree in creative writing, has to be aware of theory, even if they are not converts to a particular tribe such as the poststructuralists or the new historicists. In Australia our discipline has been theorising its practice and its brand of research for more than ten years. (16)

A whole generation of graduates in Creative Writing who have gone on to teach in universities now takes Theory for granted, and this will continue. The post-Theory generation in Australia is also composed of established academics in literary and cultural studies who also publish creative work, and for whom the recent development of Creative Writing has offered the opportunity to combine their two interests. More and more teachers of Creative Writing across the world will thus be comfortable shifting between academic and literary modes of writing, and with combining the two, as well as investigating links with contemporary theory. For instance, in a 1999 essay about the hybrid mode of writing known in Australia as *fictocriticism*, Helen Flavell describes the eclectic interests of a typical student in the New Humanities:

Anna is 24 and a postgraduate student. Her university doesn't have sandstone arches and ivy creeping; she's been brought up on a transdisciplinary diet of various subjects levelled under the umbrella of 'communications'. She's studied creative writing, journalism, won a prize for an essay in cultural studies, and thrives on reading contemporary theory. (105)

Creative Writing 'studies' will continue to grow, partly as a means for teachers to be considered 'research active' in a bureaucracy where research funding formulae do not acknowledge creative work, but mainly because it is inevitable that the proximity of writing programmes to other disciplines within the academy will facilitate a cross-pollination of ideas. Negotiating Theory for most teachers has involved finding ways to address productively critiques of authorship, representation and aesthetic autonomy; to challenge the hegemony of formalist and New Critical concepts of literature; to develop in students

an awareness of the critical and social context of the work they are producing; and to encourage experimental writing rather than mainstream literary genres. If post-Theory criticism relies on what individual theorists or critical insights offer as the best help for the project at hand, then the same applies to post-Theory Creative Writing pedagogy. The usefulness of Theory to the teaching of Creative Writing (as opposed to the study of the discipline) relies largely upon the idiosyncracies of teachers and their academic research interests. As Siobhan Holland says in her 2002 report to the English Subject Centre in the UK: 'Lecturers in Creative Writing differ in their views on the value of critical theory as a tool in the development of students' writing and such diversity in approaches to teaching Creative Writing is to be welcomed' (4).

Teaching the craft

In practice, the goal of the writing workshop and of postgraduate supervision will always be the same: to improve the student manuscript. What remains at stake is just what criteria are employed to guide and judge the success of this goal. I think a new aesthetic has emerged in Creative Writing in the New Humanities. There has been a shift from the 'sublime' (operationalised in the workshop by praising the well-wrought line, the striking metaphor, the finely constructed scene, the authentic 'voice') to the 'avant-garde', the goal of which, in Peter Burger's well-known formulation, is 'to reintegrate art into the praxis of life' (1984: 22). This avant-garde aesthetic encourages and rewards formal experimentation, subversion and renovation of genre, dialogic engagement with non-literary discourses, intellectual curiosity, political awareness and social responsibility.

In a 2001 article, 'Materializing the sublime reader', Chris Green argued that 'before asking how students can better write "good" poems, I propose we look beyond the gaze of the sublime reader and ask how students can write useful poems' (159). By useful he means 'a workshop where the class readership acts to represent the rhetorical circumstances of interpretive communities outside the university' (154). Green acknowledges that he is drawing upon the established discourses of Cultural Studies and reader-response theory to reorient the workshop towards a concept of community service. So the 'usefulness' of a manuscript comes down to the reading practices employed in the workshop. I have written elsewhere that in the workshop 'how a work is *composed* by the student is not as important as how it can be *read* in terms of the critical approach of Creative Writing' (Dawson 2005: 88). This means a student manuscript 'is evaluated according to its potential to sustain critical scrutiny, to be approved by specific practices of reading' (2005: 117). These reading practices have shifted in the post-Theory academy from a New Critical focus on unity and aesthetic autonomy, to a poststructuralist focus on open-ended play (see Freiman 2005) and a Cultural Studies emphasis on social context.

It would be instructive here to compare two handbooks on writing published in Australia by Allen & Unwin during the period which I have been discussing: Kate Grenville's *The Writing Book: A Workbook for Fiction Writers* (1990) and Hazel Smith's *The Writing Experiment: Strategies for Innovative Creative Writing* (2005). In a sense the difference between these two books is simply a product of the different aesthetic sensibilities of their writers: Grenville is a writer of realist fiction, while Smith is a writer of experimental poetry with a particular interest in multimedia and hypermedia technologies. Smith is also an academic with research interests in contemporary theory and poetics. In a broader historical sense, however, these two books demonstrate the difference between Creative Writing before and after its engagement with Theory.

There are many generic similarities between the two. According to Grenville, 'writing is one human activity that seems to respond better to well-developed intuition than well-developed logic. What this book tries to do is give those under-developed areas a chance to practise' (xi). Smith claims that her book is based on 'incremental strategies which recuperate, at a conscious level, the less accessible or unconscious aspects of the writing process' (vii). Both writers also rely on the standard handbook practice of exercises and examples. However, Grenville is concerned with helping writers gradually build up a coherent manuscript, while Smith is more concerned with suggesting open-ended 'strategies' for writing. And Grenville's examples are from the modern canon of Australian fiction, while Smith draws on not only a wider international and generic range of literature, but examples of student writing from her previous classes.

This approach indicates that there is a crucial difference in audience. Grenville's book has been on many recommended reading lists in writing classes since its publication, but it is designed for anyone who is interested in writing. Smith's book on the other hand is 'designed for university students enrolled in creative writing courses and for their teachers. Its aims are to suggest systematic strategies for creative writing, and to theorise the process of writing by relating it to the literary and cultural concepts which students encounter on other university courses' (vii). Smith realises that the presence of these concepts means a contemporary handbook needs to do more than simply duplicate the standard devices/taxonomies of fiction, which is what Grenville's book does with titles such as 'Point of View', 'Voice', 'Dialogue' and 'Description'. Smith's book, on the other hand, has chapter titles such as 'Genre as moveable feast', 'Writing as recycling'; and 'Postmodern f(r)ictions'. Grenville's book suggests drawing upon observations of life and is implicitly geared towards realist fiction. Smith claims that her book 'makes a connection between the analytical ideas of some major literary theorists and the process of writing, and puts theory into practice' (xii). In other words, it is an aesthetic engagement with Theory in order to generate innovative approaches to writing, not an attempt to educate students about the canon of Theory, or to establish an inter-disciplinary rapprochement.

The writing workshop is not simply a place for writers to pass on practical knowledge about their craft, but a site of contestation over various theories of literature, and a site for the exchange of pedagogical links with other disciplines. If the question which once dominated discussions of Creative Writing was, 'Can or should writing be taught?', it is now, 'What should we be teaching students?' This question typically means 'Should we be teaching students Theory?', and 'What sort of Theory will be useful to them as writers?' An equally important question is 'What sort of writing should we be encouraging students to produce?' The aesthetic of post-Theory Creative Writing pedagogy is clearly geared towards experimental modes (anti-linear, discontinuous, multi-generic, self-reflexive, and so on) because these are more amenable to contemporary criticism. There is a danger here of promoting certain types of writing over others, rather than promoting a spirit of experimentation in all genres, 'conservative' or otherwise. It also begs the question of an ideal audience, and hence the way Creative Writing positions itself in relation to the literary marketplace.

The corporate university

The most pressing concern for the discipline of Creative Writing is not how to accommodate Theory in a traditionally anti-intellectual subject, but how Theory might help situate the discipline in what Richard Kerridge, in his editorial for the inaugural issue of *New Writing*, calls the 'audit culture' of the modern corporatised university, a culture

which assumes that ‘the main purpose of all subjects in higher education is the provision of transferable skills for employment’ (2004: 3). This is an institutional environment in which ‘generic definitions have confronted teachers in all subjects with the disconcerting new language of key skills, programme specifications, level descriptors and learning outcomes, terms that imperiously take from teachers the prerogative of identifying values’ (3). Kerridge’s argument is that Creative Writing ‘lives in the borderland between the academic and the vocational’ (4) and thus is well-poised to counter this audit culture.

There is in fact an uneasy synergy between the corporate language of this audit culture and the critical discourse of Cultural Studies which now dominates the New Humanities. They are both utilitarian, but one emphasises vocationalism and profit, while the other emphasises activism and critical consciousness. In his 2005 article, ‘Cultural Studies in the corporate university’, Jonathan Rutherford posits an historical link between the two, suggesting that the success of Cultural Studies ‘as a multidisciplinary field of study that crosses the boundaries of economic, social and cultural life was both enabled by and also helped to legitimise the modularisation and marketisation of Higher Education’ (309). And Simon During argues that Cultural Studies has replaced English in the corporate university because it has responded to both student demand for training in the culture industries, and the demands of a global economy for national competitiveness (During 1997). The debate between literary practice and critical Theory in Creative Writing Studies is, ultimately, not one over types of cultural capital represented by competing ‘canons’, but part of a wider debate about what transferable skills graduates need in the new economy. For instance, in the pages of *TEXT*, Jen Webb posed the question, ‘What do writing students need?’

My response to this question – a response predicated on my other-other identity as a cultural theorist – is that one of the skills writing students need is in understanding the politics of identity and representation; and that the active incorporation of cultural studies methodologies within the creative writing program is a good starting point for its provision. (2000: 1)

Webb justifies this in professional terms rather than in terms of overcoming intellectual naivety, ‘on the grounds that it broadens students’ skill bases’ (2). While in America much is written about how outmoded assumptions of Creative Writing need to be reformed (or about how it can resist these reforms for the sake of literature), in Australia and the UK Creative Writing claims the post-Theoretical dynamism of the new, drawing on the rhetoric of praxis to distinguish it from traditional English studies and position it within the new economy of the Creative Industries. In describing a power shift within the university system which Creative Writing is poised to benefit from, Nigel Krauth writes:

English and Humanities Departments, that once held sway in terms of offering studies for generic and analytical interpretative language skills, are now facing notions of ‘productivity-value’ not previously encountered. Reading and criticising texts, as opposed to producing them, doesn’t cut so much ice with the clientele anymore. In the 1990s, the ‘real world’ focus of university training has added a practical ‘can do’ aspect to the receptive ‘will do’ orientation of English departments and traditional arts degrees. (2000: 5)

In other words, the response to a perceived decline in the cultural capital of literature has not been to set up a rearguard action or to embrace the canon of Theory; it has been to recognise ‘creativity’ as the cultural capital of the new Creative Class, which Richard

Florida defines as 'people in science and engineering, architecture and design, education, arts, music and entertainment, whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology and/or new creative content' (Florida 2003: 8).

The term 'creative writing' has traditionally operated as a synonym for literature, and one which emphasises literature as a process rather than a product, but the fact that the word creative now refers in common parlance to any form of human endeavour, and the fact that the word writing is itself genreless, means that Creative Writing is almost by definition limitless in its disciplinary application. This is why the subject is taught in a range of disciplines in Australian universities, alongside literary and cultural criticism, the visual and performing arts, journalism, advertising and public relations, and new media technologies.

The PhD in Creative Writing

The growth of the PhD as a degree option in the subject is the most salient feature of Creative Writing in the post-Theory academy. It is important because the sort of doctoral education provided to a new generation of teachers will not only define Creative Writing as a research-based discipline, but also determine the future direction of the way the subject is taught at all levels.

As writing programmes proliferated in American universities after the Second World War, the Master of Fine Arts (MFA) became the most common degree in Creative Writing, and is still recommended by the AWP as the 'terminal' degree in the discipline, and as the equivalent of the PhD in literature. The MFA is conceived as a practical studio training for aspiring artists rather than a research oriented education for future intellectuals and teachers, and this system has taken the brunt of criticism about the role of Creative Writing in the academy and its impact on literary culture. The small but growing number of PhDs in Creative Writing are now being offered as a solution to some of the intractable problems associated with the discipline, particularly in relation to its intellectual narrowness.

In 2001 Kelly Ritter pointed out the declining value of the MFA, suggesting the degree is no longer considered a sufficient qualification for a university teaching position unless the candidate has several books published. Hence the PhD has become an important additional degree for MFA graduates who hope to teach in the academy. However, for this doctoral degree to justify its existence, Ritter argues, it needs to be marked as professionally distinct from the MFA. Her suggestion is that the PhD in Creative Writing be reconfigured towards teacher training, specifically 'the ability to teach undergraduates in the field' (208). Patrick Bizarro makes a similar point in his 2004 article, arguing that if Creative Writing is to operate as a discipline in its own right it must offer a distinct doctoral degree. For Bizarro this would involve the systematic teaching of skills employed by writers which are equivalent or analogous to those of scholarly research, and it would involve the teaching of skills required by writing teachers.

Both Ritter and Bizarro emphasise the need to provide PhD candidates with discipline specific skills rather than those offered by standard doctoral courses in literary research and composition teaching. In neglecting to discuss the creative dissertation itself, they demonstrate a belief that what defines Creative Writing as an *academic* discipline (rather than the master-apprentice system offered by the MFA) is its ability to be taught in a scholarly self-reflexive fashion, as opposed to its ability to produce new writing. In other words the creative dissertation is still conceived as a literary work to be circulated outside the academy instead of a contribution to disciplinary knowledge.

The PhD is a more widespread option in Australian universities, which Nigel Krauth claims are 'international pioneers in developing the creative writing doctorate' (2001). The reason for the growth of this option throughout the 1990s is again largely economic: in the modern research university the PhD is now an essential academic qualification for aspiring teachers; and universities are keen to enrol large numbers of students because they attract research funding from the federal government. Many established teachers of Creative Writing who were initially hired on the strength of their creative publications have undertaken doctoral study for professional reasons: in order to achieve promotion, or to meet standard requirements that supervisors of doctoral candidates should themselves possess a PhD. And a growing trend has been for PhD programmes to accept for candidature well-established writers with national and international literary reputations, many without strong academic backgrounds or any aspirations to work in the academy. For these writers the three-year federal scholarship for doctoral study offers a substantial alternative to grants from government arts bodies such as the Literature Board for the Australia Council.

The debates over the PhD in Australia and the UK have differed from those in America because the degree structure itself is different. Whereas in America doctoral students must complete substantial coursework and language requirements as well as sitting for comprehensive examinations before submitting their dissertation, in these countries there is no formal coursework and the degree is assessable by thesis only. The thesis consists of a creative dissertation and a substantial critical essay, often referred to as the 'exegesis', of up to 50 per cent of the word limit. This model comes from research degrees in the visual and performing arts, where a formal reflection on the creative process provides an interpretive guide to examiners for ephemeral performances or non-verbal artefacts.

Whereas in America debate exists over how coursework requirements can encourage reflection on Creative Writing as a teachable subject, in Australia debate exists over how the exegesis can encourage reflection on the creative dissertation as an intellectually rigorous enterprise. In the exegesis students will typically theorise their own creative process, reflect on the theoretical underpinnings of the creative work and its dialogic engagement with non-literary discourses, or contextualise the creative work in relation to specific genres, critical movements, etc. Hence requirements for some sort of relationship between the exegesis and the creative dissertation provide a formal opportunity for students to explore intellectual links between literature and critical Theory as modes of writing (as opposed to links between the teaching of writing and the study of Theory). The dilemma over how the relationship between the two components of this hybrid thesis is to be assessed has generated many articles by both students and academics in the pages of *TEXT*, providing a fundamental focal point for disciplinary investigation.

The debates I have outlined demonstrate a marked shift away from a conception of Creative Writing as formal training for new writers, and towards a conception of it as practice-oriented research. They are debates not just about doctoral education, but about how Creative Writing defines itself as an academic discipline in the New Humanities. The future of the discipline hence resides in how it theorises and manages the traditional nexus between research and teaching in the modern university.

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