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The Rise of Creative Writing

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In *The Elephants Teach,* his analysis of the complex history of Creative Writing as a university subject in the United States, D. G. Myers remarks that Creative Writing achieved its 'full growth' as a discipline in the late 1960s and early 1970s '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)' (2006, p. 149). Myers's argument (in context) is persuasive, though the binary starkness of his proposition inevitably fails to anticipate the increasingly vocational orientation of many undergraduate programmes (with their emphasis on skills appropriate to employment in the 'creative industries') and the research orientation of many PhD programmes (with their aim of producing serious academics).

In offering this much more modest account of the rise of Creative Writing in the UK, I am grateful to lean on Myers's analysis while being conscious also of the need to acknowledge the varieties of contemporary practice and orientation within the discipline, whether at undergraduate, Master's or Doctoral level. These variations relate in differing ways to the wider discipline of English Studies, and each has relevance beyond any narrowly national or even Anglophone context. But while the variations will no doubt multiply as the discipline continues to develop as a global phenomenon, the trajectory of its emergence in each national context may well follow the pattern established in the United States, beginning with a questioning of the discipline's academic credentials, proceeding haltingly to an accommodation with its undeniable appeal to students and administrators, progressing through a period of sudden and exponential growth that provokes a further questioning of the discipline's academic credentials, and eventuating in a reformed—or at least expanded—understanding of its relation to other

A. Hewings et al. (eds.), *Futures for English Studies*
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disciplines, including Literary Studies. Schematic as this certainly is, it does appear to describe something of the experience in the UK.

'Diligently finessed but slightly anodyne': the institutionalisation of writing

Initially in response to its novelty, then in reaction to its ubiquity, the commentary that has accompanied the rise of Creative Writing in the UK has been marked by a scepticism bordering on contempt and has taken the form of several now familiar and often contradictory claims, many focused on the validity of such programmes as a form of literary apprenticeship. An impressionistic survey of such views might include, for instance, the supposition that talent will be stifled by the requirements of a curriculum, that talented writers will succeed regardless of any curriculum, that Creative Writing programmes dupe their students with false claims about future publication, that the literary marketplace is saturated with the products of such programmes, that institutions shield their students from real experience, and that literary endeavour is necessarily solitary. Above all, there is the assertion that writing cannot be taught, coupled with the claim that Creative Writing programmes are nevertheless responsible for producing—presumably through the efficacy of their teaching—a surfeit of homogenised, unadventurous, 'assembly-line' writing.

These last two views may not be entirely contradictory, however. The claim that writing cannot be taught is that 'true originality' cannot be taught, with the corollary that writing programmes must therefore offer a schooling in how to construct decent, somewhat ersatz literary works whose sole distinguishing feature is their technical competence (and formal conservatism). A refinement of this claim is that certain celebrated programmes operate to a corporate aesthetic that marks their Master's graduates in particular as recognisably the product of those courses, as may be illustrated by a couple of book reviews that take the programme at the University of East Anglia (UEA) as symptomatic of a wider malaise. The first of these is an appreciation in *The Guardian* of Suzannah Clapp's *A Card from Angela Carter*, which says:

> [Carter's] early work in particular has a proto-punk surrealism to it, all exposed joins and twisted edges. And Carter's prose style was always 'helter skelter hoopla', as Clapp puts it. Carter was, in short, pretty much the opposite of what *Private Eye* recently called 'the diligently finessed but slightly anodyne' school of UEA-type good taste. (Turner, 2012)

The *Private Eye* piece to which this refers is a review of *Body of Work*—a volume published to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the UEA programme (Foden, 2011)—in which the anonymous reviewer doesn't merely identify a school of diligent, slightly anodyne writing associated with UEA, but proposes more generally that 'creative writing degrees are simply another stage in the institutionalising process that threatens to turn English literature into a branch of the Civil Service' (*Private Eye*, 2012, p. 28). In other words, the university is appropriating the once-social practices of writing and criticism and thereby curtailing the capacity of the former to innovate while usurping the authority of the latter to evaluate.

This plainly is to ignore the foundational role of Creative Writing at undergraduate level in supporting the study of English Literature through practice-based learning, as well as its developing role in fostering skills deemed appropriate to a range of careers in the 'cultural sector'. It also fails to recognise the emergence of Creative Writing as a research practice at Doctoral level. And while there is some irony in promoting Angela Carter as the opposite of the institutionalising process, since she was herself a teacher of Creative Writing (at UEA, in fact), the journalistic disquiet revealed by the reviews testifies to the continuing force of the Romantic legacy that assumes literary achievement to be the expression of natural talent, the outcome of a God-given faculty superior to reason and therefore to pedagogy, while serving to prolong the debate about the relative importance of nature and nurture, innate ability and taught facility, creation and imitation. Arguably this aligns with an ambivalence about the limits of pedagogy that persists among even the most committed of teachers of Creative Writing and finds its clearest articulation on the website of the most illustrious of graduate programmes, the Iowa Writers' Workshop:

> Though we agree in part with the popular insistence that writing cannot be taught, we exist and proceed on the assumption that talent can be developed, and we see our possibilities and limitations as a school in that light. If one can 'learn' to play the violin or to paint, one can 'learn' to write, though no processes of externally induced training can ensure that one will do it well. Accordingly, the fact that the Workshop can claim as alumni nationally and internationally prominent poets, novelists, and short story writers is, we believe, more the result of what they brought here than of what they gained from us. We continue to look for the most promising talent in the country, in our conviction that writing cannot be taught but that writers can be encouraged. (Iowa, 2007)

For Mary Swander *et al.*, anxious to argue the legitimacy of Creative Writing as a distinct academic field, and writing in a handbook designed to establish the parameters of that field, such a statement serves to perpetuate 'the Romantic myth' that 'talent is inherent and essential' and is potentially undermining of the claims of Creative Writing to be accepted as a discipline, for if writing cannot be taught 'then it might also follow that student work cannot be evaluated and programmes cannot be assessed' (2007, p. 15). But such concerns are, in one obvious sense, moot, since Creative Writing is everywhere *being* taught, and everywhere evaluated, particularly in the Anglophone academy, and not merely at MA level.

'A flourishing discipline': some numbers

Paul Munden's report for the Higher Education Academy, *Beyond the Benchmark*, provides some numbers for the UK. In 2013, there were 141 higher education institutions offering 504 degree programmes in which Creative Writing was a significant element, while figures supplied by the Higher Education Statistics Agency show that enrolment for courses in which 'Imaginative Writing' was the major element climbed from 2,745 in 2003 to 6,945 in 2012 (Munden, 2013, p. 8). Corroboration of this may be found by comparing the figures displayed on the website of the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE) with those given in Siobhan Holland's 2003 report for the English Subject Centre. NAWE's online directory states that there are currently 'over 83 HE Institutions offering undergraduate courses, sometimes in combination with other subjects such as Film, Literature or Language Studies. A similar number offer MA courses, with almost 200 to choose from. More than 50 universities offer Creative Writing PhDs' (NAWE, 2014). Holland's report from ten years earlier declares: 'Creative Writing is a flourishing discipline within the academy. Twenty-four HE institutions are offering named undergraduate programmes in Creative Writing in the academic year 2002–2003 … Graduates can choose between 21 taught and 19 research-based postgraduate degrees …' (Holland, 2003, p. 2).

In short, in ten years in the UK the number of HEIs offering BA courses (in a variety of combinations) rose from 24 to 83, while the number of MA courses rose from 21 to 200, and the number of PhD programmes from 19 to more than 50.

As measured in courses, then, the growth of Creative Writing in the UK over the last fifteen years has been rapid, appears to be accelerating, and is plainly not confined to MA provision. Nor is this just a

UK phenomenon. Here especially the pattern follows the template established in the United States, where membership of the Association of Writers & Writing Programs (AWP) rose from 13 institutions in 1969 to 500 in 2011, while the number of degree-conferring courses rose from 79 in 1975 to 852 in 2010 (Fenza, 2011). Comparative figures for Australasia are harder to come by, but one indication of the growth of the discipline may be found in the four-fold increase in the number of PhD courses, from eight in 1999 to 31 in 2009 (*TEXT*, 2014), while the emergence of the discipline beyond the Anglophone academy may be gauged by the membership listings on the website of the Asia-Pacific Writers & Translators Association (APWT, 2014) or by the growth in membership of the European Association of Creative Writing Programmes (EACWP), which rose from nine institutions in 2005 to 23 in 2014 (Briedis, 2014).

The appearance of subject associations is one significant indicator of disciplinary identity, and is evidenced in the UK by the increasing prominence of NAWE. Concomitant with the UK expansion in courses, meanwhile, has come the recognition of a PhD in Creative and Critical Writing as the entry qualification for the field, a greater connectedness with institutions and representative bodies internationally, the widespread staging of pedagogical conferences, and a proliferation of pedagogical literature, including peer-reviewed journals of international scope (pre-eminently the Australian online journal *TEXT*). The subject is taught, and has acquired the apparatus of academic legitimacy and the appearance of disciplinary self-confidence. But in addition to this consolidation a number of areas of negotiation or contestation have become evident, many centred on the relationship of the 'creative' to the 'critical' within the discipline, others concerned with the relationship of Creative Writing to the wider discipline of English Studies. The issues, in either case, are reminiscent of the conditions that informed the inception of Creative Writing, both in the United States and, several decades later, the UK.

'Learning by doing': the American invention of Creative Writing

In order to situate and explain the rise of Creative Writing in the UK, it will be instructive to follow the narrative of Creative Writing's prior emergence and development in the USA, as described in *The Elephants Teach* (Myers, 2006). This locates the beginnings of the discipline in the late nineteenth century as a reaction against a prevailing

philological approach that addressed literature as a corpus of historical and linguistic knowledge but failed to allow for the possibility of that corpus being supplemented by the works of living writers. In this, Creative Writing was both an experiment in education and a creative-critical enterprise whose goal was critical understanding 'conducted from within the conditions of literary practice' (p. 133). It was 'learning by doing', and initially—in the 1870s and 1880s at Harvard—this assumed the guise of a re-formation of the teaching of rhetoric under the rubric of 'English composition'. But whereas traditional rhetoric had emphasised a rule-bound correctness, a subordination of the self to 'grammatical exercises, spelling drills, and the memorization of rhetorical precepts' (p. 37)—usually in the study of Latin—English composition emphasised individuality, self-expression and the importance of the imagination.

The subsequent development of the discipline, as Myers goes on to explore, is more complicated than might be conceptualised in terms of a simple dichotomy between the practical and the scholarly. On the scholarly side—at least until the advent of New Criticism—individual literary texts continued to be scrutinised for what they might reveal about larger cultural texts, while on the practical side there was the teaching of instrumental language—technical English, business English—which achieved ascendancy as 'English composition' reverted to a mechanical regime of precepts and drills. 'Historically', says Myers, Creative Writing 'beckoned a third way' (p. 8), but it wasn't yet called Creative Writing, and in the first two decades of the twentieth century it beckoned with diminishing force until given fresh impetus by the confluence of three phenomena: the appointment of Robert Frost as the first writer–in–residence at an educational establishment, at Amherst in 1917; the invention of the artists' colony and writers' conference—Carmel, Bread Loaf, MacDowell, Yaddo—which advanced the role of writers as teachers; and, crucially, the emergence of the 'progressive education' movement in high schools in the 1920s, which promoted a doctrine of self-expression and the nurturing of the child's natural abilities (thus storing up for the future the pedagogical conundrum of whether writing could or should be *taught*.)

A key text of this child-centred movement was Hughes Mearns's *Creative Youth,* which was, in 1925, the first publication to use the term 'creative writing' to refer to a course of study. But still, at university level, there wasn't yet a discipline of Creative Writing, and this, for Myers, came about with the appointment of a critic, Norman Foerster,

to the School of Letters at the University of Iowa in 1930. Importantly, Foerster was not only scornful of the blindness of philological scholars to contemporary writing; he was equally scornful of the historical ignorance of many contemporary writers, who were too interested in 'problems of technique' and—in their reliance on the expressive self—overly inclined towards 'solipsism' (Myers, 2006, pp. 134–135). Thus creative writers at Iowa were required to do scholarship as a structured part of their course, just as scholars were required to do Creative Writing (p. 136), and the kind of scholarship required was New Critical scholarship, which respected the autonomy and sufficiency of the individual literary work.

At undergraduate level, classes in Creative Writing soon became commonplace—and popular—while remaining faithful to the founding pedagogical goal of achieving critical understanding through creative practice. But despite the success of the Iowa program, and the impetus given by the 1944 'G.I. Bill', which guaranteed four years' free education to returning servicemen, by the mid-1960s there were still only five graduate programmes in the USA, and when the expansion of Master's courses finally occurred it was in the direction of training would-be authors for publication and would-be writing teachers for teaching. At Master's level, that is, Creative Writing became a form of professional apprenticeship once again removed from critical scholarship, so what had begun 'as an alternative to the schismatizing of literary study had ended as merely another schism' (p. 168), a schism that was exacerbated by the advent in the academy of Theory, as symbolised by the appointment in 1976 of the structuralist Northrop Frye as President of the Modern Languages Association.

Frye's election, for Myers, represented 'the revolt of literary study against literary value' and 'the view that meaning and value are not *in* literary texts—that novels, stories, and poems have neither meaning nor value in themselves' (pp. 169–170). In effect, this recreated the conditions that had produced Creative Writing almost a century earlier. As Myers says of nineteenth century philology, 'Any treatment of a literary text as something created rather than determined, a transcript of individual choices and not a specimen of larger forces, was left out of the account' (29), and the subsequent expansion of Creative Writing—both in America and in the Anglophone academy elsewhere—might be understood against this backdrop: as a reaction to the dominance of a Theory-driven approach that was indifferent not only to questions of aesthetic value, but to the authority of authorship.

'A cultural intervention': UEA's adoption of Creative Writing

A comparable history remains to be written of the emergence and rise of Creative Writing in the UK, and would necessarily involve an examination of the importance of adult (or 'continuing') education, the commitment to interdisciplinarity and seminar-based learning in the newer universities, and the vocational complexion of the polytechnic system—building perhaps on the 'historical snapshots' assembled by Michelene Wandor in *The Author is not Dead, Merely Somewhere Else* (2008, p. 18). It might trace the impact of extracurricular writing workshops at a number of universities in the 1950s and 1960s, such as those provided for undergraduates by Angus Wilson at UEA (Holeywell, 2009, p. 21) or the gatherings organised by the poet-academic Philip Hobsbaum, who was 'responsible for the management of four writing groups, respectively in Cambridge, London, Belfast and Glasgow', the first of these in 1952 (Hobsbaum, 1992, p. 29). And it might elucidate—as indicated by Giles Foden (2011, pp. 15–16)—the pattern of informal support for Creative Writing in 'traditional academic settings' such as Oxford and Cambridge through the provision of writing fellowships, the funding of literary magazines and prizes, and the employment of creative writers as academics, beginning with the appointment in 1912 of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch as the King Edward VII Professorship of English Literature at Cambridge.

Inevitably, however, such a history would be bound to examine the several continuities with the American experience that mark the inauguration of the MA in Creative Writing at UEA in 1970. As in the States, for instance, the UEA programme began as an experiment in education—in a new university committed to educational innovation (Holeywell, 2009, p. 21)—and just as English Composition and, subsequently, the Iowa School of Letters, had 'established the institutional validity of submitting creative work for academic credit' (Dawson, 2005, p. 60), the MA at UEA proceeded from the identification of this same possibility, initially securing a concession merely to offer Creative Writing 'as a possible small supplement to an academic MA degree' (Bradbury, 1995b, p. ix). The American academy, meanwhile, had a long tradition of employing practising, publishing authors to teach literature, and UEA followed suit, firstly in the appointment of Angus Wilson and then, to a lesser extent (he was already an academic), Malcolm Bradbury, both of whom had recent experience of teaching in American universities. Crucially, Creative Writing at Master's level in the USA

had evolved into a form of literary apprenticeship, and UEA Creative Writing was mindful of the professional context from the outset while also insisting on a conjunction of the creative and the critical that was the structuring premise of Creative Writing at Iowa.

Bradbury especially was conscious that British literature and British publishing appeared to be in crisis—'Serious publishers seriously talked about dropping the serious or literary novel—so it clearly needed a context of reinforcement and support, an intellectual environment' (1995a)—but the ultimate impetus for the introduction of Creative Writing at UEA appears to have been his and Wilson's shared sense of the developing schism between creative and critical practice, as described by Bradbury in the introduction to *Class Work,* an anthology of UEA alumni published to coincide with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the MA:

> One odd fact struck us. Though everyone was announcing the Death of the Novel, no one was announcing the Death of Literary Criticism. In fact (as was clear from the climate in our own university) criticism, stimulated by the new thoughts of France, was undergoing a vivid resurrection, emerging in the new guise of Literary Theory … Since Angus and I were both novelists as well as teachers of literature, and took our profession seriously, it seemed somewhat strange for us to be announcing the Death of the Author in the classroom, then going straight back home to be one. What seemed even more grievous was that the practice of criticism and the practice of writing were splitting ever further apart. Where once writers and critics had been much the same people, now the practice of writing and the theory of its study seemed ever more to divide. (1995b, pp. vii/viii)

Here and in each of his several other accounts of the founding of the UEA programme, Bradbury makes clear his ambition to influence the culture and 'ensure that professors of contemporary literature have something resembling contemporary literature to study' (Bradbury, 2000, p. 22). In this, as Michelene Wandor observes, the UEA project had from the outset an 'aesthetic-vocational aim of making a cultural intervention in the creation of a contemporary literary canon' (2008, p. 18), an intervention whose effectiveness may be measured not only in the roll-call of its published alumni (UEA, 2014) and the widespread adoption of Master's provision elsewhere, but the recognition among potential authors and their potential publishers of the value of such courses as a form of professional preparation.

'Practical knowledge': the MA workshop

If Bradbury and Wilson succeeded in providing a refuge for the embattled academic category of authorship and a context of support for the production of literary works, they were arguably less successful in healing the division between 'the practice of criticism and the practice of writing'—at least as it pertains at Master's level. With certain exceptions, and many variations, the 'typical' MA course continues to emphasise the acquisition of technical skills and the completion of a publishable manuscript over the concerns of critical scholarship, and while Creative Writing and Literary Studies frequently reside in a relationship of departmental proximity, they continue to take divergent approaches to the conception and study of literature. The difference, Paul Dawson suggests, rests on the distinction between process and product: 'The object of study in a Creative Writing class, whether it be a published work of literature or a student manuscript, is scrutinised in terms of the process of its making, rather than as a literary artefact' (2005, p. 38). For Literary Studies, in other words, literature is what has been written; for Creative Writing, it is what is being written. The knowledge generated in each case will be different, and while the critical encounter with a literary work may 'produce' that work anew with each reading, and may—in the emerging context of 'creative criticism'—be productive of more *writing* (Benson and Connors, 2014, p. 27), it will not allow for the original work to be rewritten in response to its reception, as routinely happens in the Creative Writing classroom.

Dawson is not, however, sanguine about the distinction he proposes. His powerful and often persuasive polemic, *Creative Writing and the New Humanities,* is emblematic of a certain critique that emanates from within Creative Writing and tends to find its signature pedagogy—the peer-review workshop—insufficiently attuned to the cultural, social, political and theoretical context in which literature is defined, disseminated and consumed. Dawson presents the workshop, in fact, as a defensive formation in which amateurism and evaluation may be protected from the incursions of institutionalisation, professionalism and the hostility of critical theory. It is a privileged space in which a community of writers may gather under the patronage of the university for the purpose of enabling 'established practitioners' to 'pass on practical knowledge about their craft' to literary aspirants with a view to hastening the students' accreditation as fully fledged practitioners themselves (2007, p. 85). In this, it provides a refuge for traditional humanist literary criticism and a forum that facilitates 'the therapeutic discovery of

a neo-Romantic expressive voice' (2005, p. 177) while construing the literary 'in terms of aesthetic autonomy' predicated on a 'withdrawal from politics and society' (p. 187).

Dawson's remedy for the failings of the workshop is the application of a 'sociological poetics' (pp. 208–209) that would interrogate the student's work-in-progress for its underlying ideological assumptions, reading it not as the expression of an individual author but the outcome of broader social and cultural discourses. The workshop would cease, in fact, to be a *writing* workshop at all, for which reason his critique has been subject to numerous rebuttals (Myers, 2006, p. 172; Harris, 2009; Cowan, 2011), not least because it has every appearance of reinstating the conditions—Theory-driven, hostile to authorship, indifferent to evaluation—that initially gave rise to Creative Writing. That aside, Dawson's focus on the workshop neglects the extent to which many MA courses—including UEA's—support their 'creative' core with 'critical' electives and define their pedagogical aims in terms of an interrelationship between the two, a structural conjunction that is constitutive of many undergraduate programmes, too, particularly where Creative Writing is offered as one element in a joint honours degree with English Literature—that is, where creative practice is situated within a systematic programme of engagement with the literature and criticism that informs and contextualises the students' own work.

'A very wide range of combinations': the varieties of BA provision

In his report for the Higher Education Academy (HEA), Paul Munden notes that Creative Writing is now offered in 'a very wide range of combinations', despite the 'widespread belief that the link with English is vital, indeed that undergraduate Creative Writing study is questionable without it', and remarks that one programme 'goes so far as to state the purpose of Creative Writing within the combined BA as being to "provide a form of practice-based knowledge to support the study of English Literature", an extreme end of the spectrum of opinion that many would contest' (2013, p. 11). Whether there is such a spectrum, having such extremes, the claim may simply be a reiteration of a key premise at the discipline's origins and a recognition of a pedagogical theme that has remained consistent throughout its subsequent development, partly in response to a conception of Creative Writing as inspired self-expression in the service of personal growth. The more contentious proposition, perhaps, is that writers do not require a scholarly

grounding in the literature that precedes and surrounds them in order to be effective writers, though it is certainly true that writing is a skill applicable to many more contexts than the conventionally literary.

The tension between these two orientations—literary-critical and vocational—would appear to be constitutive of the discipline, as evidenced by the BA in Writing and Publishing that was inaugurated at Middlesex Polytechnic in 1991. Identified by Michelene Wandor as the first undergraduate course to be formally established in the UK (2008, p. 9), this was the outcome of modules offered on the English Literature programme since 1984 as a means of introducing 'practice-based ways of enhancing the teaching of literature', but was additionally intended to provide a 'functional "vocational" skills-base for other university subjects, as well as for the wider world of cultural employment' (p. 18). In this latter aim it anticipated the increasing tendency for Creative Writing to be offered in combination with subjects other than English—Film, Media, Digital Humanities, Drama, Computing Studies—a variety of couplings that serves to emphasise the vocational virtues of the subject in providing a grounding in skills appropriate to a range of professional settings. But even when offered in combination with English Literature, the 'employability' claims of Creative Writing may be more compelling than those of most other Humanities subjects and provide one explanation for its growing appeal. In the absence of a discipline of Composition on the American model—a programmatic training in functional or instrumental writing skills—Creative Writing offers itself as an indirect means of acquiring a vocationally useful education:

> From publishing to copywriting, editing, journalism, proofreading, public affairs, public relations, teaching, in-house business communications, information technology, market research, community work, from working in a literary agency, to working in a library or various branches of the media or many aspects of the cultural industries—in all these professional areas and more, training and experience in creative writing can give a significant advantage (Green, 2012, p. 326)

If this assumes an advantage to one particular group of students, the instrumental benefits of Creative Writing to students other than creative writers is suggested by a survey conducted at Leicester de Montfort University with the aim of identifying the 'relevance of creative writing skills and activities to the study of English Literature programmes' (Bell and Conboy, p. 2009). Having completed a single module in Creative

Writing, 95 per cent of the (admittedly small) sample of Literature students agreed that they had gained 'a better understanding of the editing process', 76 per cent that their grammar and punctuation had improved, 84 per cent that their vocabulary had improved, 90 per cent that 'the expressiveness of their writing' had improved, 82 per cent that 'creative writing had increased their self-confidence as writers', and 74 per cent that 'creative writing had improved their critical reading of literature'. All of which supports Jonathan Bate's suggestion, in his Foreword to *The Cambridge Companion to Creative Writing,* that an education in 'the *craft* of putting together words' is among the key contributions that Creative Writing can make to English departments (2012, pp. xvi–xvii).

'A healthy dialogue', Bate proposes, 'is one in which critics are interested in writerly skills—rhetoric, narrative construction, pacing—and students of creative writing are unafraid of critical judgement' (pp. xvi–xvii)—which is, of course, to conceive of two distinct bodies, the critic and the (somewhat timorous) writer, though Bate goes on to suggest that the conjunction of Creative Writing and English may signal a reassertion of pre-institutional origins of English literary criticism, and identifies in John Dryden the sire to a lineage that takes in a succession of exemplary poet-critics—Pope, Johnson, Coleridge, Arnold, Hazlitt, Ruskin, Eliot—before the interregnum effected by the ascent of Theory (pp. xvii–xviii). And indeed, where Creative Writing continues to be offered as a joint honours degree with English, a genuine site of interaction between the creative and the critical is to be found in the students themselves, for whom the two parts of the degree take on a relationship of complementarity. Conversely, where Creative Writing is offered as a single honours degree—or in combination with other subjects—it may appear to provide an inadequate critical education, though advocates of single honours might argue the irrelevance of such an education to practice-based learning, or the sufficiency of the two forms of critical engagement that are distinct to the pedagogy of Creative Writing: the 'critical self-commentary' and 'reading as a writer'.

This latter term was coined in 1934 in a non-academic context, Dorothea Brande's classic teach-yourself text, *Becoming A Writer* (1996, p. 91), and developed in another, R. V. Cassill's *Writing Fiction* (1962, pp. 6–8), and is the practice of close reading applied to exemplary texts—whether complete works or illustrative excerpts—as a form of literary appreciation dedicated to the acquisition (or, perhaps, absorption) of technical know-how. Historical and contextual understanding is largely excluded, though the critical self-commentary often encourages

the reinstatement of some such understanding by requiring students to describe, in David Morley's words, 'the affinities you may feel [your work] has with the work of other authors … placing [it] in any intellectual, aesthetic, social or other context you feel it should be seen in' (2007, p. 37). Vague as this certainly is, the practice of self-exegesis necessarily reasserts the authority of authorship and the importance of authorial intention, though it can also be read as ironically undermining of both in that it appears to demand a demonstration of critical self-awareness as a prophylactic against the writerly solipsism of 'the expressive self', and represents a form of insurance against the shortcomings of the creative work through a compensating display of critical competence.

The *Creative Writing Subject Benchmark Statement* issued by NAWE describes the wide variety of formats that this 'accompanying critical, reflective or contextualizing piece' may adopt, and suggests that its primary purpose is to provide an aid to assessment, an additional means by which the achievements of the creative work may be judged (2008, p. 9). Of equal importance, however, is the underlying issue of how the exploratory and uncertain nature of creative practice may 'become answerable to knowledge' (Magee, 2012) at both the individual and disciplinary level—in other words, how creative practice may be construed as 'a process of investigation leading to new insights effectively shared', the currently operative definition of 'research' for academic funding purposes in the UK (HEFCE, 2009). This in turn will have a bearing on the legitimacy of Creative Writing as a university subject.

'The bifurcation of practice': the PhD and the writer-academic

The research status of Creative Writing is described in some detail by the NAWE benchmark statement, which proposes that Creative Writing 'may be seen as a form of "speculative" research that is then re-visited and tested through redrafting, reconsideration and revision, as the author explores their own text as its predicted reader' (NAWE, 2008, p. 12).

As Paul Munden observes, this rubric is broad and 'could be construed as relating to Creative Writing at any level. There are no clear lines between the exploratory work of undergraduate students and that of postgraduate students' (Munden, 2013, p. 28). In practice, however, the exploration at undergraduate level tends to be contained by the pedagogy, which codifies knowledge in Creative Writing as a set of practical skills that can be taught, a set of confirmed understandings that can be transmitted, tested and described. At Master's level—in the workshop

especially—the pedagogy may take on a more uncertain complexion, the discussion achieving something of the contingency of writing itself, being relatively unstructured, relatively fluid, a process of shared discovery that may—in some institutions—be deemed sufficient demonstration of the students' self-understanding in relation to their craft. At Doctoral level, however, this process of discovery often also becomes the object of scrutiny, a problematic to be explored, and while most students will be working on a full-length creative work that they hope to see published, they will also be undertaking training as researchers, often with a view to pursuing a career in academia, and will frequently become participants in the meta-discourse that is key to establishing the conceptual parameters of the discipline.

This disciplinary discourse has been termed 'creative writing studies' by Stuart Glover, who itemises its modest palette of preoccupations as:

> (1) the pedagogy of creative writing; (2) creative writing's constitution as an academic discipline and its epistemological status … that is, investigations into the kinds of knowledge creative writing studies produces, particularly through research by creative practice; and (3) the compositional aspects of individual creative practice. (Glover, 2012, p. 293)

Clearly the first and second of these will encompass the expository and reflective 'outputs' of writer-academics, while the third is particularly relevant to the exegetical element of Doctoral theses. For some writers in academia, however, their contribution to this discourse, and to the 'disciplining' of Creative Writing within an institutional audit culture of performance indicators, has entailed an unwelcome requirement to conform to the conventions of established research definitions, necessitating a contortion of their professional identities and working practices so as to resemble more conventionally 'academic' categories. Jen Webb describes, from an Australian perspective, how this effort of contortion also requires 'artist-academics to be successful art practitioners' *and* 'successful researchers' if they are to fulfil their university's contractual expectations of them, a conundrum whose solution has been 'to assert that creative practice in fact constitutes research, thus neatly avoiding the double burden, or the bifurcation of practice' (Webb, 2012).

Scott Brook, similarly writing from the Australian perspective, points to the importance of 'institutional *realpolitik*' in the acceptance of the 'the legitimacy of creative works as research' (Brook, 2012), but while this acceptance appears to have come about only recently in

the Australian academy—in 2009, in fact (Krauth *et al.*, 2010)—the tendency in the UK has been to recognise the sufficiency and integrity of creative works, both for the purposes of research assessment exercises and the calculation of research leave entitlement. Nevertheless, despite the contortions and compromises, and the acceptance of creative work as research-equivalent (or simply *as* research), many writer-academics in the UK have begun to assume a dual identity in the academy, becoming 'both fully literary in their art practice, and fully "academic" in their scholarly practice' (Webb, 2012). In this they are modelling what remains a requirement on Doctoral students: to be what Webb terms 'double-mode practitioners' (2012).

Given that writers in the academy are also teachers, and that the PhD has emerged as an essential criterion in academic job specifications, some element of teacher training and teaching practice has also become integral to most PhD programmes, meaning that new entrants to the discipline are credentialed for teaching in a way that their predecessors, relying on their publications, were not. Inevitably this gives further cause for disquiet among literary commentators since it raises the spectre of universities becoming engines for the production of teachers of unpublishable writing, an accusation of self-perpetuation acknowledged by D. G. Myers:

> The history of creative writing since the Second World War has been the history of its development into what American industry calls an 'elephant machine'—a machine for making other machines … As early as 1964, Allen Tate warned that 'the academically certified Creative Writer goes out to teach Creative Writing, and produces other Creative Writers who are not writers, but who produce still other Creative Writers who are not writers'. (2006, pp. 146–147)

Nevertheless the goal of becoming a published and thereby certified writer remains the ambition of most Doctoral students, for whom the 'double mode' suggested by Jen Webb often registers in the title of the 'PhD in Creative and Critical Writing' that is offered in many UK institutions, though the more commonly named 'PhD in Creative Writing' similarly requires the submission of both a creative and a critical thesis. The first such degree in the UK was conferred by UEA in 1990 on the Jordanian/British writer Fadia Faqir, whose thesis comprised the novel *Nisanit* and a relatively short commentary on the writing of the novel, and while the combination of a substantial creative work with a shorter critical essay has remained a consistent requirement (the

typical weighting being 80 per cent creative to 20 per cent critical), the recognition of the self-exegesis as an original contribution to knowledge is beginning to be supplanted—certainly in my own institution—by an expectation that the critical thesis will address the themes (formal, contextual, conceptual) of the creative work without necessarily commenting upon it, leaving the relationship between the two discourses—creative and critical—more implied than explicit.

This move away from what could be seen as the solipsism of the self-commentary to a fuller recognition of the scholarly potential of the creative writer not only represents a multiplication of the possibilities of the PhD, but suggests a partial fulfilment of Malcolm Bradbury's aspirations for Creative Writing: that it might help to heal 'the schizoid division that has developed between writer and critic' and bring about 'a new kind of alliance, a fresh interaction between the creative and the critical … where the notion of the Death of the Author is replaced with the idea of the Creativity of the Writer' (2000, p. 22). The convergence implied in this 'fresh interaction' has an interesting parallel, meanwhile, with developments in the orientation of criticism in the 'post-theory' academy, newly awakened to the creative potential of the critical writer.

'The charisma of authorship': creative writing and creative reading

Writing in the *Times Higher Education,* Nicholas Royle suggests that the rise in Creative Writing has encouraged and accentuated 'an ambience of narcissism and self-centredness' that speaks directly to a contemporary 'culture of the self', and that this is allied to 'a quiet but deluded sort of triumphalism' that the impact of Theory may not have brought about the death of the author after all. Against this he proposes that a significant legacy of Theory is to have collapsed the distinction between the creative and the critical, inventing a role for the critic who 'does not simply describe or analyse but brings something new, something of their own, to the text under consideration'. This he calls 'creative reading', an approach to texts that is 'not only rigorous, careful, attentive to historical context, different connotations and nuances of meaning and so on, but also inventive, surprising, willing to take risks, to be experimental, to deform and transform' (Royle, 2013).

Royle's promotion of the critic as a producer of texts closely aligns with Benson and Connors' search in *Creative Criticism* (2014) for a critical idiom and approach that is adequate to what Mark McGurl calls 'the therapeutic enchantments of literary experience' (McGurl, 2009, p. 12).

The challenge, they suggest, lies in recognising and recording 'the mutable matter of reading as event or encounter or happening' (p. 2) by fashioning a response to the literary work that avoids making the primary experience of the encounter subservient to a discourse of critical authority—a 'language of criticism [that] has always already been chosen by another' (2014, p. 14). Rather their hope is to foreground the excitement and singularity of the encounter, the lively specificity of its coming into being as an experience, and in this they—like Royle—may be emblematic of an unforeseen consequence of the rise of Creative Writing: the institutional space it has opened up for a reconceptualisation of the role of the critic and possibly, more broadly, of the discipline of Literary Studies.

In another context, Royle makes the obvious point that the Barthesian concept of the 'death of the author' is 'explicitly figurative or metaphorical' (Bennett and Royle, 2009, p. 23) and cannot be taken to imply a denial of the existence of empirical authors, of whom Barthes himself was one. Despite the literalism inherent in Malcolm Bradbury's joke about 'announcing the Death of the Author in the classroom, then going straight back home to be one' (1995b, p. viii), what is challenged by Barthes's argument is any appeal to authorial intention for the unequivocal and unchanging meaning of a text, for while the figure of the author will inevitably be conjured up by readers, the meaning of the text will be highly mutable and will lie in the 'the peculiar double bind of reading [whereby] the reader makes the text and the text makes the reader' (p. 16). Barthes's prophesy that the 'birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author' (1977, p. 118) finds its proof, perhaps, in this promotion of criticism as a primary discourse, impatient with mere reading and pushing on into authorship, whether this is performed under the rubric of 'creative reading' or of 'creative criticism'.

This development in Literary Studies may not simply arise in response to the strongly anti-intentionalist thrust of New Critical, structuralist and poststructuralist theory, or as a reaction to the alienating anti-humanist authority of those critical modes, or even as a response to the contagious influence of Creative Writing in the academy. It may also be explained by the reflexive turn in the wider culture that Mark McGurl cites in *The Program Era*—his comprehensive survey of the impact of Creative Writing on post-war American literature—as a major influence on the spread of the discipline. Among the many instances of 'self-observation' that are characteristic of the contemporary world, McGurl nominates as fundamental 'the self-monitoring of individuals who understand themselves to be living, not lives simply, but *life stories*

of which they are the protagonists' (2009, p. 12). Understood in this context as an 'experiential commodity that the student purchases with tuition money', the Creative Writing programme invites its student-consumers 'to develop an intensely personal relation to literary value, one that for the most part bypasses the accumulation of traditional cultural capital (that is, a relatively rarefied knowledge of great authors and their works) in favor of a more immediate identification with the charisma of authorship' (pp. 15–16).

Whether or not the critical establishment is as readily seduced by the charisma of authorship—and whether it is even possible to generalise about critics, or to continue to make the distinction between critics and writers—the cultural capital accrued by the presence of novelists, poets and playwrights on campus offers one guarantee of the continuing spread of Creative Writing in the academy. The subject's appeal to university administrators is in part explained by its employability claims, which are unlikely to diminish and which will continue to translate into application numbers, admission numbers, and ultimately student fees income. But as Mark McGurl notes, an equally significant factor is the 'relative prestige' conferred on an institution by the writers it employs, who contribute to the university's 'overall portfolio of cultural capital, adding their bit to the market value of the degrees it confers' and thereby testifying to 'the institution's systematic hospitality to the excellence of individual self-expression' (2009, p. 407). That hospitality, and the real-world reputation of those writers, also acts as a powerful incentive to student applicants, some of whom will themselves go on to publish and become a reputational asset in their own right, thus attracting more students, and thereby translating cultural capital into the financial capital that is accrued in student fees income.

Perhaps ironically, the reputation of many of the writers employed in academia will have been secured against the belletristic values that were banished from the academy over a century ago but which are still thriving in the public realm: in publishing houses, book review pages, prize juries, and among the reading public. In other words, it is the endorsement of those same literary commentators who bemoan the institutionalisation of writing that will do most to secure the continuing presence of writers in the academy. The readiness of the academy to continue to recruit them is meanwhile unlikely to diminish given the increasing emphasis placed by many universities (and league tables of universities) on 'transferable skills' and 'employability', the increasing reliance of the publishing industry on Creative Writing programmes as a reliable source of new authors, and the increasing readiness of universities and funding

bodies to acknowledge—whether for reasons of *realpolitik* or not—the research credentials of creative practice. What may be overlooked in all of this is the primary and originary reason for incorporating 'learning by doing' into the academy—the particular insights offered by creative practice in the study of literature—though here it may be that the study of literature will, in some incarnations at least, incline increasingly towards a new form of creative practice, that of 'creative criticism' and the attempt to find 'words in response to the work of another' that will allow the critic to engage in what Stephen Benson and Clare Connors promisingly describe as 'a form of "continuing"' (2014, p. 27).

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