



Teaching and Researching Creative Writing: The Emergence of Creative Writing Studies

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When we consider the contemporary study of literature, which might focus on particular genre, on authors, on types of text, on the literary outputs of regions, on questions of race, gender and sexuality explored in literary work, or the contemporary study of language—whether through applied linguistics, historical-comparative linguistics, or through semantics or morphology, for example—we might also be drawn to consider the critical study of creative writing.

Whereas once such critical study was largely entwined with the field of Literary Studies, and somewhat less frequently included in the study of language, today the critical study of creative writing has grown into a field in its own right, most often referred to in such countries as the USA as the field of Creative Writing Studies. Creative Writing Studies, which you might occasionally see referred to as CWS, is distinctive in being about the ‘live’ practices of creative writers, focusing on ideas, outcomes and creative decision-making specifically as they occur in the creating of works of creative writing (that is, not primarily in the created works that emerge from this), and by the field’s considerable attention to the pedagogies associated with creative writing.

The field of Creative Writing Studies has emerged largely over the past thirty years. Today it is a global phenomenon. The story of its growth is reminiscent of the global flourishing of the field of Media Studies, which gathered momentum in the 1960s, and was well developed in many parts of the world by the early 1970s. Where interest in developing Media Studies occurred it often drew on and informed connected areas of research and teaching, such as that in Communication Studies, journalism, media theory, cultural studies, semiotics, and media production. Similarly, Creative Writing Studies has seen its evolution

informed broadly by the study of literature and of language and CWS, in turn, has been informing the study of these by bringing more discussion of creative practices and pedagogies and research methods related to creative practices into these fields.

In some cases too, Creative Writing Studies has been informed by other arts practices such as those associated with music and drama and the visual arts, and their critical apparatus. In the USA in particular, CWS has also been enlightened by work in Composition and Rhetoric, or what is colloquially known as Rhet/Com, and by Rhet/Com's disciplinary sub-sets: Composition Studies, Writing Studies, as well as studies of literacy and the humanistic study of rhetoric. In other regions of the world—for example, in the United Kingdom and in Australia—the emergence of the concerted critical study of creative writing was informed by the establishment of doctoral programs in creative writing that occurred around 30 years ago and, in those regions, the field has been growing ever since.

The doctoral study of creative writing in the UK and Australia—which, by being an extension of general teaching, might seem to be simply an offshoot of the growth of the field itself, but is actually a core influence—came about when a small number of academics in Literary Studies, in Culture Studies and Theory, and in Education saw an opportunity to develop programs drawing on these fields. Further still, some creative writers could see the potential for such qualifications to further support their employment in higher education. Also, simply, many had a desire to know more about their art, and thus they sought out graduate programs that combined the practice of creative writing with research connected to this.

The doctoral of creative writing in countries such as Australia and the United Kingdom, but including New Zealand and South Africa and also evident in continental Europe and, more recently, strongly growing in China, and evident in Brazil and in a number of other countries too, has primarily focused on “practice-led research” (that is research through the practice of creative writing). This has been informed by a wide range of critical interests and explorations, defined largely by the creative writer and often relating significantly to their own creative outputs. This focus on practice-led research made the emergence of Creative Writing Studies in these countries a little different to that in the USA. However, by the early part of the 21st Century, and gradually, the different national stories of CWS began to be shared regularly through national and international conferences and through journals and an increasing number of book publications. Today,

Creative Writing Studies is a multi-faceted global field, with strong communication between its many and differing methodologies, varied analytical foci, and a range of potential critical and creative outcomes. CWS is also not limited to work only in the English language and at this time such countries as China and Brazil, among others, are further developing Creative Writing Studies in their principal languages.

Embracing the study of the modes and methods of creative writing, CWS continues to develop new avenues of exploration, informed by creative writing practice but increasingly aware of there being many uncharted areas of exploration. Of course, some of this work is continuing naturally to be through practice-led research (where researchers undertake creative work in order to explore ideas, representations, structural forms and functions, procedural techniques and so forth). This approach, by the very nature of the individualism involved, sees the charting of personal routes to discovery, which can unearth new linguistic or literary findings, as well as inform a specific creative project or suggest modes of composition previously undefined. But CWS also draws on philosophies of creative practice and ideas about potential textual outcomes. These consider the nature of textual evolution or open up debates about how language is formed and applied and exchanged. They also highlight issues of gender, race, sexuality, able-bodiedness—broadly concepts and issues associated with identity - and consider how creative writing forms, techniques and outputs (that is, substantially, the texts that emerge, both complete and incomplete) function to embrace, embody and exchange identity and identities.

In all this, it is easy to see that those with interests in the fields of Literary Studies or Linguistics will recognize Creative Writing Studies as a kindred field. But they will also notice the CWS's epistemological focus places it differently in its investigation of and use of knowledge. Where research occurs in CWS it is likely to be presented as a continuity between the practices of creative writers in the contemporary world, the association with individual researchers' own creative practices or with the practices of contemporaries who may or may not be part of the CWS community, and in the delivery of best informed teaching of creative writing. This most often will be teaching of those with interests in pursuing creative writing, not those currently with critical interests in the field.

Paradoxically, despite the growth of Creative Writing Studies, currently the majority of students in creative writing worldwide (and certainly those who are undergraduates) are not pursuing critical study of creative writing in the CWS mold. Rather they are continuing to study the practice of creative writing

alongside the study of Literature or Language. At graduate level there is more alignment between the growth of Creative Writing Studies and the work of graduate students, but even then CWS is still new enough that graduate study of creative writing is more likely to see the undertaking of the practice alongside work in Literature or Language than it is to see study of Creative Writing Studies per se.

The fascination for us all in this—whether you are a Creative Writing Studies scholar or a scholar of Literature, Linguistics, Literary Studies, Communication Studies, or any number of other fields on which CWS has drawn—is that the contemporary research topics emerging in Creative Writing Studies are both further defining the field and speaking back to the fields from which the methodologies and philosophies of CWS have largely emerged.

As it continues to grow and expand worldwide, research in Creative Writing Studies will influence the work of literary scholars and linguists in many ways—predictably in discussions of the dynamics of language or the ways in which literary form functions between writer and reader (or, that is, creator and receiver) or in how culture intersects with the texts produced in a culture, or in comparing one author's outcomes with those of another author. This is just an indicative list. Perhaps more excitingly, research in and through Creative Writing Studies will impact the fields of Literary Studies and Linguistics in other ways that we cannot yet predict. It might be that the growth of CWS will offer these fields the opportunity to further define themselves, in relation to and perhaps even in contrast to CWS. In doing so we will see an expansion of the ways in which we come to understand literary production and the works that emerge from it, those who undertake it and those who consume the creative outputs that emerge from it. This expanding of knowledge will contribute to our knowledge of what the writing arts and literature mean to us—now, and in the future.