

NEW WRITING VIEWPOINTS

Creative Writing and Education



EDITED BY
GRAEME HARPER

NEW WRITING VIEWPOINTS: 11

Creative Writing and Education

Edited by
Graeme Harper

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

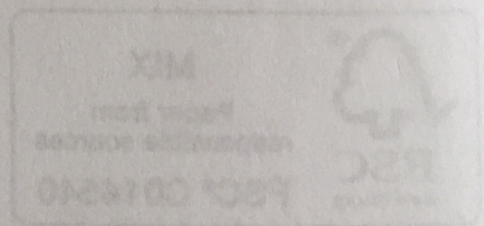
Bristol • Buffalo • Toronto

NEW WRITING VIEWPOINTS

Series Editor: Graeme Harper, Oakland University, Rochester, USA

The overall aim of this series is to publish books which will ultimately inform teaching and research, but whose primary focus is on the analysis of creative writing practice and theory. There will also be books which deal directly with aspects of creative writing knowledge, with issues of genre, form and style, with the nature and experience of creativity, and with the learning of creative writing. They will all have in common a concern with excellence in application and in understanding, with creative writing practitioners and their work, and with informed analysis of creative writing as process as well as completed artefact.

Full details of all the books in this series and of all our other publications can be found on <http://www.multilingual-matters.com>, or by writing to Multilingual Matters, St Nicholas House, 31-34 High Street, Bristol BS1 2AW, UK.



Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Creative Writing and Education / Edited by Graeme Harper.

New Writing Viewpoints: 11

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Creative writing—Study and teaching. 2. English language—Rhetoric—Study and teaching. 3. Interdisciplinary approach in education. I. Harper, Graeme, editor.

PE1404.C724 2015

808'.0420711—dc23 2014044717

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue entry for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN-13: 978-1-78309-353-3 (hbk)

ISBN-13: 978-1-78309-352-6 (pbk)

Multilingual Matters

UK: St Nicholas House, 31–34 High Street, Bristol BS1 2AW, UK.

USA: UTP, 2250 Military Road, Tonawanda, NY 14150, USA.

Canada: UTP, 5201 Dufferin Street, North York, Ontario M3H 5T8, Canada.

Website: www.multilingual-matters.com

Twitter: Multi_Ling_Mat

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/multilingualmatters>

Blog: www.channelviewpublications.wordpress.com

Copyright © 2015 Graeme Harper and the authors of individual chapters and commentaries.

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the publisher.

The policy of Multilingual Matters/Channel View Publications is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products, made from wood grown in sustainable forests. In the manufacturing process of our books, and to further support our policy, preference is given to printers that have FSC and PEFC Chain of Custody certification. The FSC and/or PEFC logos will appear on those books where full certification has been granted to the printer concerned.

Typeset by R.J. Footring Ltd, Derby

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Short Run Press Ltd

Contents

Acknowledgments	viii
About the Authors	ix
Accounting for the Unaccountable: A foreword in 42 tweets <i>Philip Gross</i>	xvi
 Creative Writing and Education: An Introduction <i>Graeme Harper</i>	 1
 Chapter 1 Revelation, Transgression, Disclosure and the Tyranny of Truth <i>Randall Albers and Steve May</i>	 17
 Chapter 2 Dragging the Corpse: Landscape and Memory. Two Writers Consider How the Role of Identity in Their Own Writing Leads into Educational Practice <i>Liz Cashdan and Moy McCrory</i>	 29
 Commentary 1 The Breath and the Bomb, or, In Praise of the Uneducable <i>Marcela Sulak</i>	 41
 Chapter 3 Embracing the Learning Paradigm: How Assessment Drives Creative Writing Pedagogy <i>Dianne Donnelly</i>	 46
 Chapter 4 Greater Satisfaction from the Labor: Creative Writing as a Text Response Strategy in the Teacher Education Classroom <i>Toby Emert and Maureen Hall</i>	 57

Commentary 2	
Poetry by Heart	
<i>Paul Munden</i>	68
Chapter 5	
Creative Writing as Education in the Chinese Context	71
<i>Fan Dai</i>	
Commentary 3	
Tracing Roots in a Foreign Language	83
<i>Asma Mansoor</i>	
Chapter 6	
Questions and Answers: Responding to Creative Writing Teaching and Learning	87
<i>Craig Batty, Simon Holloway and Gill James (with Graeme Harper)</i>	
Commentary 4	
Against Carefulness	100
<i>Katharine Coles</i>	
Chapter 7	
Interpretation, Affordance and Realized Intention: The Transaction(s) Between Reader and Writer	107
<i>Nigel McLoughlin</i>	
Chapter 8	
Movement, Maps, Mnemonics and Music: Teaching Fiction and Poetry Writing Using Sight and Sound	120
<i>Gail Pittaway</i>	
Commentary 5	
Don't Look Now: Exploring Smellscapes and Soundscapes Helps Writers-To-Be	133
<i>Sieneke de Rooij</i>	
Chapter 9	
Redesigning the Lecture in a Cyber World: A Creative Writing Case Study	138
<i>Kevin Brophy and Elizabeth MacFarlane</i>	
Chapter 10	
Originality and Research: Knowledge Production in Creative Writing Doctoral Degrees	150
<i>Jeri Kroll</i>	

Commentary 6	
Taking Creative Writing Seriously in Schools	166
<i>Maggie Butt</i>	
Chapter 11	
The Poetry of Evaluation: Helping Students Explore How They Value Verse	171
<i>Michael Theune and Bob Broad</i>	
Chapter 12	
The Radical Future of Teaching Creative Writing	183
<i>Nigel Krauth</i>	
Commentary 7	
'Born This Way': In Celebration of Lady Gaga	196
<i>Brooke Biaz</i>	
Index	200

Don't Look Now: Exploring Smellscapes and Soundscapes Helps Writers-To-Be

Sieneke de Rooij

The Overpowering Visual Aspect

As a creative writing teacher, I often work with students taking their first course in creative writing. These newbies in the world of writing classes have frequently been writing for years, hiding their texts in their notebooks, too shy to show them to readers yet also utterly convinced of their own talent.

In many of their stories and poems, I've found they predominantly use descriptions of a visual nature. They write about color and texture, size and measurements, light and dark. They can tell you what their characters look like and what they wear, what their house and street look like, their workplace and their colleagues. The visual aspect is easily accessible to most people, and when you haven't been made aware of this writing automatism, you simply don't notice it in your text. In fact, the visual in texts by inexperienced writers can be so strong that I have come to believe that I can help them reach a deeper level in their writing by forcing them to use the sources of their other senses. I have to do this at an early stage of the course, or they risk settling firmly in their habit of writing mainly from the visual sense and neglecting the power of sound, smell, taste and touch (and emotional feeling).

So what happens when I tell my students to use all their senses except their vision and later, when writing, to write without any visual aspects? What does it do to them and their texts if they are forbidden to use their most accessible sense?

To help my students find more variation in their writing, I created some lessons and assignments in which I forbid any visual input from entering a text. (A hard task indeed, and most students subconsciously sneak in some color anyway, but if they try very hard the results are much better.) I put a ban on writing about anything that can be seen, and focus on smell and

sound to access memories. These memories can later be used to write a family history or can they can be raw material for poetry and prose.

I choose to concentrate on smell and sound because of their undisputed power of projecting people into memories and physical recollections. (I am a great lover of smell and sound myself; it's hard for me to resist buying an old sleigh bell or a strange herb.) The process of working with smell and sound, prompted from reality and continued in imagination, leads to a completely different set of memories and experiences. The effect is that texts become much more varied and profound. These texts also have more impact on readers, which can be heard in the feedback rounds.

Smellscapes

I start a first workshop with the aid of my home-made Ol'Factory (in Dutch it's called the *Olfactotheek*, but the English name turns out to be more fun). This is a collection of smells with historical value to most people, which I use to help them to access memories. The Ol'Factory is a little suitcase filled with small jars. Each contains some 'stuff': fluids, grains, solid matter. Most cannot be recognized visually. The collection was created after an ample poll among students, relatives and other writers. All smells are powerful and unique. To name a few: a well known 'smell for elderly ladies' that remind people of their grannies instantly (in the Netherlands, this is 4711 or Maja soap); sherry; a particular brand of baby shampoo that everyone recognizes; *trassi*, a sharp and rather unpleasant-smelling ingredient of the Indonesian cuisine which is traditional in the Netherlands; cinnamon and nutmeg spice cake; copper polish; a classic old-fashioned aftershave that our fathers used in the 1950s and 1960s; a medicinal disinfectant odor; a sharpened pencil; and so on.

The jars are unmarked. My students go around in silence and smell. They do not have to determine the scents, just let themselves drift away in any memories or associations. I encourage them not to speak, but the jars do provoke a lot of laughter, sighs, nodding and scribbling. The fact that they don't have to know what they smell is liberating – it makes them free to pursue their own thoughts.

After that, they sit down in silence, and write in reaction to prompts I give them. I read at a slow pace, with time for note-taking, but not too much, to keep some pressure on:

A fresh scent, a sharp scent, an old scent, a new scent.

A scent from my childhood, a scent I never smell anymore, a scent belonging to grandma.

A white scent, the scent of an animal. A black scent, a grey scent.
 A scent from another world; a scent from the future.
 A scent I have forgotten, a scent I don't know. A scent that reminds me
 of....

Then they have a list, which they may quickly edit (in no more than three minutes).

Everyone reads their list out loud. Discussing our results afterwards, we are often surprised at some scents that seem important to several people – freshly mown grass, bread baking, apple pie, seashore – as well as some very personal, unique and interesting descriptions that emerge from this exercise. 'This is poetry already!' one of my students once remarked. How true. After that remark, we wrote titles for our lists. 'What I still miss' made a list into a poem. When we have worked the lists into new texts, usually some very original poetry emerges.

Soundscapes

Another great help in leading writers away from the visual aspect is the use of old, real-life sounds. My favorite collection is the Library of Vanished Sounds. The version in English is at <http://www.nps.nl/nps/radio/supplement/99/soundscapes/bibliotheek> (click on the WAV links). Many sounds are typically Dutch; others are more universal and some are British.

I give my students the assignment to stroll around in this Library and explore various sounds, then choose one to work into a short text about a main character who is confronted with this sound. (In Family History writing courses, they can use this exercise to write a scene for their own project.) Listening to sounds without seeing visual images brings you much deeper into the listening experience. Many people find this activity quite addictive and can hardly choose.

Students' new texts resulting from this assignment are interestingly different. Overall, writers as well as readers or listeners hear much more intensity in the text's atmosphere and much more emotion, both in reading aloud and in reading silently. Physical sensations such as goose-bumps are often reported. Readers can bring associations to mind much more easily. Feedback is more about emotions: melancholy, nostalgia, *Weltschmerz*. More readers experience physical sensations of fear, excitement, breathing, as their bodies react more to text where sound is strongly incorporated. Old car horns, steam whistles, planes taking off in the Second World War, the London Blitz, a teletype room and the auction master at top speed at the fish auction in Urk in 1936 can do that to you.

The texts themselves have a film-like impact, like in the opening scene of a movie that gently slides you into the story so easily or grabs you with great force.

Last but not least: writers report much more introspection during the writing process and more concentration while writing.

Working with sounds from real life (as opposed to musical inspiration) is an inspiration for students to continue to focus on sound and smell. (Of course, the same can be experienced with the sense of touch.) Some of my students presented me with new scents for the Ol'Factory and made me smell rifle grease and Brylcreem for the first time. And did you know that dead ladybirds give off a *very* specific odor?

Conclusion

To show rather than tell you about some of the results in my students' texts is complicated, as they have all been writing in Dutch. But I can give examples of what some of my students in a Family History writing project have been doing differently from before.

One woman wrote a scene about a walk in the dunes along the North Sea, using almost exclusively bird sounds to describe the experience of the main characters. She used some bird guides for the description of the sounds, to bring in a lot of variation.

'Daddy, daddy,' Wim cried. 'We heard the Ghost of the Dunes!'

And, indeed, the Dutch text really does make you hear ghosts in the dunes.

Another woman wrote about two people leaving on a ship. They have been waiting for a long time in the cold wind for the ship to leave, grabbing the icy railing. Eventually, the deck starts vibrating and at the same time the steam horn gives off a deafening, rumbling sound. Their bodies start trembling with excitement as they can feel their feet searching for new balance.

A third student describes a little girl, sitting under a staircase with her mother and little brother. All around them, things come crashing and crumbling down. Outside, noises change faster than she can understand. Inside, she hears her mother's voice, praying softly. And the neighbor is still playing his accordion.

The next story is about a boy and his mother on a train platform. He can see nothing; we understand that he is surrounded by legs, suitcases, coats. All the sounds echoing in this large railway station frighten him and his

mother's voice cannot reassure him. The shrill whistle of the train about to leave makes him jump; a woman is crying for her child; planes fly over the station. 'Just keep close to me', his mother keeps repeating.

When we discussed these texts to give feedback, I asked my students to comment in two ways on the text read out loud: to describe to each writer what 'film' they saw in their mind, and to tell them about the voice they heard. All students commented on how much more feeling they had for the main characters, and how they felt they knew them very well already. Apparently this writing with a reduction in visuality, but entering the worlds of hearing, feeling and smelling, brought them all closer to the people and their lived experiences.

Then there is the great side-effect of association. Sounds and smells easily trigger memories of other sounds, smells, taste and experiences. So when we (in Amsterdam, looking at the historic windmill from my window) talk about windmills turning in a good breeze, we also start hearing children running on their clogs, on cobblestones. And the next moment you are smelling pea soup! This may sound like a cliché, but it is simply how the mind works.

After a few experiments in writing without the visual with quite different groups of students, I am convinced that we, as teachers, can help our students bring more depth to their work in this way. Sometimes I even throw in a sixth sense for fun, an idea which may open up whole new worlds of imagination.

I am sure that many of you have tried, but if not: take a fun risk and do compel your students from time to time to leave all this seeing alone and observe in different ways with other senses. Increased introspection in the writing process is, in my opinion, one of the most productive long-term effects. *Don't look now; come to your senses* is a fertilizer for writers who are just starting to work their land.

Sieneke de Rooij is a Creative Writing Consultant, Writer, Editor and Creative Writing Teacher in the Netherlands. She was an editor for various Dutch publishing houses; her own books, articles and apps have been published since 2000. She organizes workshops and courses for students of all ages and coaches writers working on their manuscripts, and has been an advisor for new writing initiatives in the Netherlands. In 2014, she started a new initiative for Creative Writing teachers, with poet and CW teacher Margriet van Bebbber, Dactylus (the Academy for Creative Writing Teachers), which is now training 12 students a year to be creative writing professionals and is providing courses and master classes.

This book explores creative writing and its various relationships to education through a number of short, evocative chapters written by key players in the field. At times controversial, the book presents issues, ideas and pedagogic practices related to creative writing in and around education, with a focus on higher education. The volume aims to give the reader a sense of contemporary thinking and to provide some alternative points of view, offering examples of how those involved feel about the relationship between creative writing and education. Many of the contributors play notable roles in national and international organizations concerned with creative writing and education. The book also includes a Foreword by Philip Gross, who won the 2009 TS Eliot Prize for poetry.

"This is a tremendously stimulating and timely book. Global in scope yet sensitive to local conditions, this is a collection that will help recast the future of Creative Writing in Education at large. Teeming with expert dialogues and punctuated by synoptic commentaries, the volume is unusual in spanning school, college and university, and in exploring the relations between Creative Writing, research and teaching. I thought I had thought a lot about these things. It makes me think again – afresh."

Rob Pope, Emeritus Professor, Oxford Brookes University, UK

"In Creative Writing and Education leading scholars and teachers offer students and faculty illuminating new perspectives on creative writing in the university setting. The book bypasses old debates about whether creative writing can be taught to instead examine how creative writing is and might be undertaken and taught at a time where universities and the wider cultural industries experience rapid change."

Stuart Glover, University of Queensland, Australia

"Creative Writing and Education recognises the complexities involved when imaginative activity is captured and framed by the educational establishment, and by prevailing 'myths' around such an awkward convergence. This book's varied and provocative international insights broaden and deepen the possibilities for creativity in writing and teaching, fusing experience, method and inspiration."

Steven Earnshaw, Sheffield Hallam University, UK

Graeme Harper is a Professor of Creative Writing at Oakland University, Michigan, USA. He is Series Editor of *New Writing Viewpoints*, as well as Editor of *New Writing: the International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*. Graeme was the inaugural chair of the Higher Education Committee at the UK's National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE). He is an award-winning fiction writer and a former Commonwealth Scholar in Creative Writing.

New Writing Viewpoints
Series Editor: Graeme Harper



Hbk ISBN: 978-1-78309-353-3