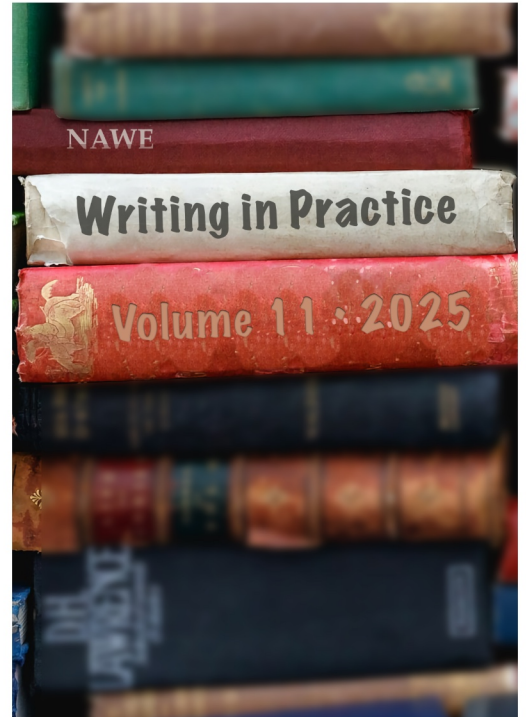




Hybridity & Experimentation in the Margins of Creative Writing

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ABSTRACT

The norm is not an apolitical natural happenstance, but rather a culturally perpetuated concept. Queer writers who reject the need to fit into heteronormative (or passing, or palatable) modes of writing can (and do) craft fascinating texts that are worthy of study; some of these queer authors choose to engage with writing that is more unconventional in nature through a hybrid and/or experimental queer poetics. A queer voice can be generative, both in terms of what a genre is/can be, and in terms of how established genres can be remixed, reformed, or redefined. Specific techniques toward hybridity and experimentation, as will be explored here, can include unexpected forms, a union of the poetic and the prosaic, and visual/linguistic multimodal composition. Example texts will include *I Keep My Exoskeletons to Myself* by Mac Crane, *Open Throat* by Henry Hoke, *She of the Mountains* by Vivek Shraya, and *The Girl and the Goddess* by Nikita Gill.

KEYWORDS

LGBTQ; Experimental Literature; 21st century; Queer Studies; Creative Writing Studies; Creative Writing; Multimodality; Poetics; Craft

...Like desire, language disrupts, refuses to be contained within boundaries."

bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*

Queer Creative Writing: In Theory, In Practice

In *Craft in the Real World*, novelist Matthew Salesses (2021) challenges the idea that "...if [writers] want to experiment, they should know tradition first" because "Writing that follows nondominant cultural standards is often treated as if it is 'breaking the rules,' but why one set of rules and not another? What is official always has to do with power" (6-7). The norm is not an apolitical natural happenstance, but rather a culturally perpetuated concept. Certain texts are treated as 'normal' because they fit the narrow expectations of white, male, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied perspectives and rules. Anything that deviates from this artificially-constructed norm is othered in some way, which may look like skepticism about quality, tokenizing praise, or outright dismissal.

Anti-normative deviation is one framework through which we can understand queer experimentation in literature.

But what is queer literature? There is the representational quality of literature to consider – i.e. a queer writer, and/or queer subjects in the literature itself. However, a work of art can be queer(ed) in more ways than this would suggest. In *Queer Threads*, artist and designer Liz Collins argues that "Threads are not queer and are totally queer just like any other material, medium, art form. Queer beings make queer art" (2017: 126). And in "Queer Experimental Writing in Korean Literature of the 2010s," Korean Studies scholar Hyonhui Choe (2018) defines queer literature by "the type of communicative situation in which it is set," further explaining that "a literary work is queer not because it represents a queer character's thoughts and behavior, but because it transmits something elusive.

By inviting readers' active engagement in determining the signification of the text, queer literature recasts the representational hierarchy between author, text, and reader" (237). Queer literature, then, can include a) literature that represents queer identity through its characters and/or author, as well as b) literature which bends, breaks, or remixes traditions and norms. (As extrapolated on earlier, it's important to recognize *whose* traditions and norms are made the standard – generally white, straight, cisgender, abled males). In her craft text *Voice First: A Writer's Manifesto*, essayist Sonya Huber (2022) argues that "voice both births genre and grows the ability to cross genres" (74).

The queer voice can be generative, both in terms of what a genre is/can be, and in terms of how established genres can be remixed, reformed, or redefined.

It is perhaps equally important to articulate what is meant by hybrid and/or experimental literature. In the introduction to *Bending Genre*, creative writers Margot Singer and Nicole Walker (2013) posit that "hybridization infuses wild energy into familiar forms. The hybrid is transgressive, polyvalent, queer. The hybrid challenges categories and assumptions, exposing the underlying conventions of representation that often seem so 'natural' we hardly notice them at all" (4). While Singer and Walker are specifically focusing on the hybrid potential of creative nonfiction, the ideas presented in *Bending Genres* can easily apply more broadly to creative writing.

In "Multiplicity from the Margins: The Expansive Truth of Intersectional Form," creative writer and independent scholar Jen Soriano (2018) argues that "Intersectional form is not so much a subgenre of literary nonfiction as it is an approach, a practice, an evolving third space, a journey of possibility" (par. 33). Singer

and Walker's conceptions of hybrid genre could apply to other established genres, like fiction and poetry; Singer and Walker's assertions certainly also apply to cross-, inter-, and multi-generic works. Specific techniques toward hybridity and experimentation, as will be explored here, can include unexpected forms, a union of the poetic and the prosaic, and visual/linguistic multimodal composition, all of which are "challenges [to] categories and assumptions" (Singer and Walker 2013: 4).

Soriano writes that "singular expectations may be useful and comfortable for those interested in maintaining the status quo. But for those of us in the margins of rule-making, singular expectations – and the way they are institutionalized – can perpetuate long histories of silencing and erasure" (2018: par. 4). In a similar vein, Huber writes that "Voices broaden and strengthen and proliferate when they are heard, responded to, and encouraged, and they wither in self-protection and hunger when they aren't listened to. Or if they're ignored and dismissed, they learn to explode and boom to make some space" (2022: 73).

Hybridity is one way for marginalized writers (such as queer writers) to "explode and boom to make some space" (2022: 73). Matthew Saleses (2021) dismisses the idea of "pure craft" altogether, arguing instead that "When writers identify race and gender and sexuality, etc., as central concerns of writing, it isn't because they have nothing to say about spacing or page breaks. They are doing the hard work other writers avoid, in order to shed light on the nature of craft itself" (14).

Queer writers who reject the need to fit into heteronormative (or passing, or palatable) modes of writing can (and do) craft fascinating texts that are worthy of study; some of these queer authors choose to engage with writing that is more unconventional in nature through a hybrid and/or experimental queer poetics. In this way, queer writers make use of an unorthodox mode of writing in order to convey marginalized identities and experiences.

Formal Experimentation and Identitarian Context

Mac Crane's (2023) *I Keep My Exoskeletons to Myself* is a fantastical dystopia that critiques the prison industrial complex and the justice system in America. The story focuses on a queer, criminalized woman named Kris as she tries to raise her child, who has been criminalized for "killing" the protagonist's wife in childbirth. This novel is queer in every sense of the word: the author is queer; the characters are queer; the text itself is queer. One way that Crane accomplishes a queerness of text is by embedding several unexpected forms within the novel. Again, Huber writes about how "voice both births genre and grows the ability to cross genres" (2022: 74). And Singer and Walker write that "Genres... are not fixed categories with

clear-cut boundaries, but constellations of rhetorical modes and formal structures grounded in varying degrees of fact. Genres are rooted in convention. They are also shape-shifters, in a continual state of flux" (2013: 4).

Crane's form-defying sections blur the edges between what is a novel and what is 'not' a novel. In this way, the inclusion of multiple forms with narrative possibility queers the form of the novel, and by extension queers the expressions of voice and narration in productive ways. The "unexpected form[s]" used "to tell a personal story" (Huber 2022: 197) in *I Keep My Exoskeletons to Myself* include pop quizzes (and, eventually, a final exam), emails, reality testing, schedules, treatment plans, games, and word searches. These forms are not randomly selected to add texture; rather, they are primarily taken from Kris' backstory as a social worker and her wife's backstory as a teacher. These forms simultaneously emphasize protagonist Kris' emotional state while establishing the novel's dystopian worldbuilding.

In "Creative Writing Praxis as Queer Becoming," Creative Writing Studies and Queer Studies scholar Dallas John Baker (2013) writes that "Engagement with the notion of Queer becoming in the act of producing creative texts can lead to new understandings of the relations between subjectivity, gender and sexuality and the practice of writing itself" (362).

The forms in *Exoskeletons*, while crafted by a queer real author, also exist within (and need to make sense within) the novel's reality.

The dystopian leaders here rely on an extreme surveillance state, wherein no one can criticize the government or say anything considered untoward, even within the sanctum of their own home.

Kris, as narrator, is working through her grief through these forms within her own mind; it would be too dangerous to speak most of this aloud, especially as someone who is already criminalized within the system. The internal creative production of the narration engages in a kind of "practice of writing," and, in doing so, Crane implicitly invites the reader to (re)conceptualize queer subjectivity through Kris. Some of the form-bending sections make this sense of Kris-as-fictional-producer-of-text more explicit. In one pop quiz, for instance, Kris has this philosophical musing:

Pop Quiz:

Q: What do you know about distance?

A: I know that I feel it everywhere. (2023: 17).

Or, elsewhere, Kris narrates:

Bonus Question:

Q: How do you know when you've chosen someone?

A: How do you know when someone's chosen you? (2023: 206).

The experimentation with form fits in with Gender and Sexuality Studies scholar and narratologist Susan S. Lanser's (2018) definition of queering voice, specifically as "a voice that confounds the rules for voice itself and thus baffles our categorical assumptions about narrators and narrative" (926). Not only does this formal experimentation grant the narrator a "transgressive, polyvalent, queer" (Singer and Walker 2013: 4) voice, but it is "inviting readers' active engagement in determining the signification of the text," this "recasts the representational hierarchy between author, text, and reader" (Choe 2018: 237).

These moments in *I Keep My Exoskeletons to Myself* highlight a queer aspect of the character's journey by focusing on relationality – implied in the distance and choosing in these quotes. But the average reader is also not expecting to come across pop quizzes in a novel text. The surprising aspect of the form is inherently tied to the surprising character identity and journey.

Such surprise occurs within a context where queer existence is othered, whether culturally or canonically.

As examples of contrasting texts, there are the *New York Times*' bestsellers of 2024 – *The Women* by Kristin Hannah, *Fourth Wing* by Rebecca Yarros, *It Ends with Us* by Colleen Hoover – which more closely follow mainstream contemporary American readers' expectations of straight, cisgender characters written about in conventional narrative structures.

In "Bad Reading: The Affective Relations of Queer Experimental Literature after AIDS," experimental fiction and Queer Narrative Theory scholar Tyler Bradway (2018) writes that "This hierarchy [of the heteronormative public sphere] restricts the affective range of reader relations and, by doing so, limits the modes of aesthetic agency and social imagination available to queer authors" (191).

However, by experimenting with voice and narration, it is possible to innovate beyond the expectations of how stories can – and should – be told. This is the essence of queering. In interweaving innovations with queerness – for example, pop quiz form with grief in a sapphic relationship – Crane is deepening the connection between form and content.

There are questions that this connection allows queer literature to explore on a craft level:

- How can an ancient artform be made new?
- How can storytelling find new modes, even modes that shift and deviate within the same story?
- How can formal experimentation add to experimentation with voice and narration, and

what might be the end goal of such innovation in queer literature?

Cross-Pollination Between Prose and Poetry
In *Open Throat*, Henry Hoke (2023) takes on the first-person point of view of a queer mountain lion living on the outskirts of a city in California. Hoke uses the poetic to capture an intimate, deep interiority, touching on a level of thought and experience that doesn't require linguistic conventions such as 'proper' punctuation or capitalization. For example, as the mountain lion narrates on the first page:

*the woman holds a phone up and says you look just like him oh my god
the man with the whip smiles and cracks it again and I feel something in the bottom of my stomach that's not hunger
I also feel hunger* (2023: 3)

This technique works toward the queer in multiple layers. At the most obvious levels, *Open Throat* is a queer text because the central character is gender nonconforming, and it is a queer text because the author is gay.

However, the language, point of view, and voice do not follow readers' typical expectations of a literary novella. Hoke's craft choices may likely seem odd (or even 'wrong') to many readers, but this embraces the act of queering in its ability to "emphasise the freedom of the verbal text to imagine a world beyond gender that resists conventional categories and conventional hierarchies" (Lanser 2018: 933). It is assumed by readers of most mainstream adult fiction that the perspective will be human, not the perspective of an other-than-human animal.

And while there are over 10,000 results on Amazon for 2023 Literary Fiction, there are only 95 results for LGBTQ+ Literary Fiction (between a minimum of 4.75% and a maximum of 9.5%). Additionally, the line breaks and grammar are conventions more ascribed to poetry than to fiction.

However, *Open Throat* is not solely a creative experiment in narrative for the sake of difference. The hybridity of poetic and narrative elements serves a purpose both in terms of craft (unsettling reader expectations of who can narrate) and in terms of the political/sociocultural (inflecting queerness at many layers of the text, including voice and character representation).

The experimentation can be tied to identity – as *Open Throat* is representationally queer in terms of character and author – but there is an argument to be made that this blurring of boundaries and what is narratively acceptable is itself a queer(ed) mode because of its ability to make storytelling stranger, to invoke other definitions of the word.

In *Craft Consciousness and Artistic Practice in Creative Writing*, Ristow writes that "strict genre boundaries based in formalism and dominant craft discourse have deleterious effects on who can call themselves a creative writer, and it delimits the pedagogical, collaborative, and development of craft consciousness" (2022: 156). Queering voice is one method of embracing the queer possibilities of literature beyond the representational level. A text can be lesbian poetry or gay memoir or asexual fiction without necessarily breaking away from formal traditions of its genre. But in exploring other ways of making meaning, and in exploring other avenues and strategies for expressing creativity, it is possible for writers to expand the ways in which their text – and, by extension, literature at large – can be queered.

Multimodality: Beyond the Linguistic
Ristow writes that "Artists understand the process of making to be an internal heuristic that triangulates with, for example, material, form, and genre," adding that "Artists need these interspaces to travel between art forms, processes, and materials to reinvigorate their practice and reimagine their identities.

Kathy, the poet/novelist based in Australia, said, 'That other medium gives you that kind of distance'" (2022: 139). Multimodal creative works bring together at least two modes of art – for example, the visual and the linguistic. *She of the Mountains* by Vivek Shraya (2014) and *The Girl and the Goddess* by Nikita Gill (2020) use formal experimentation (as seen in Crane's work) and prose/poetry hybridization (as in Hoke's) while also experimenting with visual elements.

In "Creative Writing Praxis as Queer Becoming," Baker writes about how

a Queer becoming disrupts the notion of the self as fixed, stable and unitary and replaces it with a conception of the self and subjectivity as fluid, mutable and ephemeral... Thus, a Queer becoming is not a process or practice by which a secure normative identity is substituted with a secure queer one, but rather a process in which the very notion of abiding identities is troubled. (2013: 362)

And in "'Capturing' Queer Lives and the Poetics of Social Change," Karen Lambert (2016), a scholar of poetic forms of representation, writes that "poetic inquiry and poetic modes of representation may provide an alternative way for an often silenced and marginalized 'voice' to be heard, and in that act opens a space in which to challenge oppressive discourses and present a different angle and type of knowledge regarding what it is like to 'be' different" (577).

She of the Mountains is a story, but otherwise defies simple categorization. Myths about Parvati and Ganesha are woven together with a contemporary coming out/coming-of-age/love

story. In some ways, it is narrative fiction; in other ways, it is narrative-in-verse. Like Crane does in *Exoskeletons*, Shraya uses unusual forms such as lists. (For example, at one point the protagonist makes a "dictionary of all [his girlfriend's] faces" (2014: 52).) The narrative prosaic portions of the text are perhaps the most easily legible by the average fiction reader.

However, the prose is interspersed with poetic elements throughout in what may seem to be random intervals (though the text is typically at its most poetic when the protagonist is at his most emotional). The use of repetition and typography in the sections that reiterate "You're gay" (which seems to be derived from poetic techniques more than prosaic ones) emphasizes the emotional effects of homophobic bullying. Shraya incorporates use of white space in her hybridity, such as when spacing out the letters in "respond to email" (2014: 143) to show the emotional weight of this moment in a visual way.

Shraya's text is also side-by-side with illustrations, contributed by artist Raymond Biesinger. The first time the protagonist sees another man's penis, the illustration shows crossed penises, testicles, and clouds above them (2014: 82). The image is, perhaps, as shocking and provocative to the reader as it is to the protagonist, eliciting a particular kind of empathy by having the reader in the protagonist's shoes without verbally signaling as much.

Once again, as with *Exoskeletons* and *Open Throat*, it is possible to connect the affective quality of the text (as eliciting empathy and illuminating interiority) with the queer(ed) narrative choices. This image is queer in content, but even beyond that, the form itself (of an illustrated narrative) is queered as well. The visuals offer a different mode of engagement with the queer thematic elements, muddying the boundaries of what is 'acceptable' for storytelling.

Ultimately, these techniques enhance the queer storytelling itself.

Shraya's poetics, as used in *She of the Mountains*, reflect expressions of high-stakes emotion that are more poetic than prosaic. The illustrations underscore embodiment, queering of body, and a disrupted relationship with body. This hybrid storytelling mixes the divine (myth and the gods) with the 'profane' (humanity, mortals, bodies, sex, queerness).

The hybridity pushes boundaries; it challenges conventional notions of how stories should be told, and how stories should be received.

The queerness is often (if not always) wrapped up in these choices, making this poetics of hybridity queer(ed) in multiple ways, implying

possibilities of how it can be used beyond one particular iteration.

Lambert writes about

coming to terms with one's difference, persisting in it and insisting on [as] some kind of 'queer' authenticity. It serves as an act of disordered defiance and self-reclamation that is productive in the sense that it produces effects, but also because it reproduces alternative scripts, thus exposing the lies, norms and laws of the 'heterosexual matrix' and setting up the conditions by which broader social change is not just possible but inevitable. (2016: 584)

She touches on here the idea of scripts – which can be thought of in social and cultural terms – and especially scripts that contribute to the "heterosexual matrix." To have something that is scripted implies a set of rules (or, to borrow Lambert's words, "norms and laws").

Generic rules make genre legible to its audience; formal rules make form legible to its audience. So if the expected scripts adhere to rules of a "heterosexual matrix," then cisgender and heterosexual people are presumably prioritized as the theoretical reader of a text. The average text, then, is intended to be legible to cishet people in regards to its content, genre, and form.

As Lambert implies, queer storytelling "reproduces **alternative** scripts" (emphasis added), and if they are alternative, then normative or mainstream scripts have no inherent allegiance to queerness.

The use of multigeneric and multimodal composition, then, could be theorized in terms of its ability to capture lived experiences by making them visible on the page. By operating outside of the expectations – one single genre and one single mode – creative texts can be freer to express other ways of being in the world that do not follow the scripts of white, cisgender, male, abled, heteronormative existence.

The (il)legibility of a text highlights yet another potential area of exploration in theorization: That which may be deemed narratively or poetically illegible under the regime of the "heterosexual matrix" (Lambert 2016: 584) may simply be legible to an audience that has not previously been attended to in mainstream storytelling. It may be the case that hybridity is more legible to (or pleasurable to, or engaging to) a queer audience than to a cishet audience. As such, hybridity may be widely dismissed for its work outside of the expected cishet-friendly scripts, which may in turn result in a dearth of theorization about the intersections of, for instance, hybridity and queer poetics in the field of Creative Writing Studies.

Such hybridity, however, offers opportunities for storytelling in the margins toward a "'queer'

authenticity” (Lamber 584) (or *queered* *authenticities*); it is a mode of production that can innovate not simply for innovation’s sake, but *toward* a reader’s greater empathy, and *toward* a stronger emotional connection for the reader.

In *The Girl and the Goddess*, Nikita Gill mixes poems, narrative, stories, illustrations, and myth, a combination similar to the Shraya text, though ultimately rendered differently. The prose sections of *The Girl and the Goddess* are, for the most part, narrated by gods and goddesses who are speaking to protagonist Paro directly in order to guide her as she comes of age. Gill weaves these myths in more directly, such as when Shikhandi tells Paro not to wish she wasn’t different (i.e. queer) after she has a traumatic experience where she is caught kissing a girl at school. (This narrative moment echoes Lambert’s point about “coming to terms with one’s difference, persisting in it and insisting on it” as “some kind of ‘queer’ authenticity” (2016: 584).)

Where Shraya uses illustrations as provocative contributions of embodiment and the ‘profane,’ Gill generally uses them to demonstrate divinity. In some ways, the visual elements reflect what each protagonist is trying to escape. The protagonist of *She of the Mountains* has a love/hate relationship with his body and his sexuality, and so the illustrations make the reader confront that which the protagonist doesn’t want to confront: penises, a body that feels strange, etc. What Paro has trouble accepting is her status as divine. Gill’s illustrations of the cosmic and the divine echo the prose sections where the gods attempt to directly contact Paro and help her to understand herself fully.

Soriano argues that “Writing expansive truths requires a blending of genres and bending of conventional techniques to convey the complexities of marginalized minds contending with power” (2018: par. 25). Gill’s poetics, as used in *The Girl and the Goddess*, reflect poetry as primary mode of communication. Prosaic stories come from gods/goddesses. And the illustrations are primarily used to depict divine/cosmic in some way. The primary mode of communication in *The Girl and the Goddess* (poetry) is an inverse of the primary mode of communication in *She of the Mountains* (prose). The prose in *She of the Mountains* is more human, whereas the prose stories are divine in *The Girl and the Goddess*. Shifts in both texts between the poetic and the prosaic often occur at times of high emotional stress and high emotional stakes.

Even with two narratives that overlap in much of their style of poetics, Shraya and Gill produce two very different texts. Queer possibilities are not one neatly categorized thing, and so queer poetics have many ways of manifesting. A

theorization of queer texts is not and cannot be comprehensive.

In part, theorization of queer texts inherently cannot be comprehensive because each individual Creative Writing Studies scholar will have a different positionality and background experience. This means that each scholar will bring a different perspective to each text that they work with. In addition, two texts that may appear similarly experimental on the surface (ex: two illustrated narratives such as *She of the Mountains* and *The Girl and the Goddess*) may be using those unconventional choices in different ways (as is the case with Shraya and Gill).

All Madness, No Method

Creative writer and literary theorist Jeffrey DeShell controversially argues that “There is no theory of experimental writing” (*Experimental Literature* 79), further elaborating that *There’s no development, no timeline, no taxonomy, no hierarchy of better or worse, no questions of quality, no sub-genres or further designations. It’s not a matter of determining... what social or political environment leads to the production of what writing... It’s not a problem of techniques or strategies... It’s not a question of colonialism, postcolonialism, decolonialism or neocolonialism, nor of democracy or elitism, patriarchy or matriarchy. It’s not a question of style or voice.* (*Experimental Literature* 2020: 82)

While the desire to avoid limiting experimental possibilities into existing literary boxes as-they-exist is admirable, the idea that experiments exist for their own sake – outside of and, in fact, beyond anything else art has previously accomplished – is untenably optimistic. DeShell’s argument positions experimental literature as the only kind of creative writing that truly accomplishes “pure craft” that has no context, history, or culture; Matthew Salesses firmly rejects this idea as one that simply defaults to status quo identities and perspectives (rather than exist beyond or outside of any identities/cultural contexts/etc. at all).

The connection between experimental methods and marginalized poetics brings to the fore Ristow’s idea (and others, such as Salesses’) that “Ideologies of dominant craft discourse create the methods and categories of art” that relegate women and other marginalized artists to something less than art” (Ristow 2022: 44).

There is nothing about experimental writing’s connections to other genres, cultural touchstones, realms of theory, and so on that inherently degrades what experimental literature is capable of.

To be more direct: situating experimental literature both within Creative Writing Studies as a field, as well as within certain areas of queer creative writing, does not impair

experimental writing’s status as innovative and nontraditional.

Artist Jade Yumang makes the point that “I jump from medium to medium as a conscious move, a strategy to constantly be challenged and not be too comfortable with a certain technique or style. I don’t necessarily want to be associated to one way of seeing or filtering the world, although my work is inherently queer in scope” (*Queer Threads* 2017: 148). Choe’s connection between the queer and the “elusive” gets at the spirit of DeShell’s point without veering into the troubled waters of Salesses’ “pure craft.”

Conclusion: New Texts, New Theories

In thinking about form as a container for content, it is possible to examine how those containers have been shaped by sociocultural factors, and especially how forms have been curated by those with the most power in literature and publishing (traditionally, those with the most intersectional privilege). Literature is a cultural production, both influencing and being influenced by culture, and so it cannot be analyzed fully without paying careful attention to the role dominant cultures play in form and other craft elements.

Cultural context is the area of Creative Writing Studies that has expanded in recent years by scholars such as Janelle Adsit, who writes about cultural context in the creative writing classroom, bringing identities such as class to the fore; David Mura, Matthew Salesses, and Felicia Rose Chavez approach the context of creative writing primarily from raced perspectives; Sonya Huber uses the lens of creative writing while disabled to discuss creative writing, craft, and embodiment. Other books, such as those written by Ben Ristow and edited by Audrey T. Carroll, take multiple cultures and contexts into account in how creative writing is approached.

By putting into conversation 1) what has already been theorized in regards to marginalized perspectives on craft (especially queer craft) and 2) what has already been theorized in regards to the praxis of experimental literature (under the larger field of Creative Writing Studies), it is possible to illuminate theoretical potential, as well as potential for future creative praxis.

From writers such as Mac Crane, Henry Hoke, Vivek Shraya, and Nikita Gill, we might learn a less mainstream approach to (and style of) writing, one that, for instance, allows writers to craft intimacy and interiority in ways that are unexpected and innovative.

It should be noted that, in addition to a more general discussion of the queer, we might think about the potential for intersectional interventions into the field of Creative Writing

Studies. More literature is explicitly queer now than ever before. This new abundance of queer literature (which hopefully signals a future pattern in creative writing) means there are texts, authors, and approaches to creative writing that are yet to be analyzed and theorized.

Additionally, there is more access for authors who practice hybrid experimentation, especially through independent literary magazines and presses. Given these realities, there is potential for more work to be done in the specific connections between queer creative writing praxis and hybridity/experimentation. As Baker writes in “Creative Writing Praxis as Queer Becoming,” “This Queering of writing practice and research has the potential to invigorate research in Creative Writing and provide the writer researcher with new tools to enrich creative practice, diversify research pathways and increase points of connection with creative artefacts or products” (2013: 374). Hybridity and experimentation, then, as modes of queering writing practice, offer the possibility for more inclusion, equity, and access in the creative writing world.

BIOGRAPHY

Audrey T. Heffers (who also writes under Audrey T. Carroll) is the author of *What Blooms in the Dark* (2024), *The Gaia Hypothesis* (2024), *In My Next Queer Life, I Want to Be* (2023), and *Parts of Speech: A Disabled Dictionary* (2023). She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Central Arkansas and an MA in English from the University of Rhode Island. Heffers serves as Chair of the Creative Writing Studies Organization. Her scholarly interests include Creative Writing Studies, Queer Studies, Disability Studies, and inclusive pedagogy. She can be found at <https://AudreyTCarrollWrites.weebly.com> and @AudreyTCarroll on Twitter/Instagram.

NOTES

1. Hyonhui Choe (2018) argues that “If it were absolutely clear what kind of qualities in individuals make them queer, then, it would suffice to characterize queer literature as literary works featuring queer characters or written by queer writers... queerness should not be represented in a simple and transparent way... it should appear in the form of *a radical questioning of the representation of reality*” (238, emphasis added).

2. Creative Writing Studies scholar Ben Ristow (2022) writes in *Craft Consciousness and Artistic Practice in Creative Writing* that “To build more inclusive, capacious understanding of craft, researchers must consider transdisciplinary methods for examining the histories, theories, and pedagogies of craft. Transdisciplinary

methods are interactive and relational across fields of study” (4). And literary critic Jeffrey R. Di Leo argues even more broadly that “Theory today is a multi- and inter-disciplinary endeavor” (2020: 85).

Queer poetics is not altogether untheorized within the field of Creative Writing Studies, as evidenced by the sources used here. Rather, this essay is intended to highlight an area of scholarship with the opportunity for potential growth; one very specific area of such potential growth in Creative Writing Studies is queer(ed) craft as connected to experimental literature. Queer experimental literature could be examined in terms of how such experimentation manifests, what the purpose of such experimentation in queer literature might be, and so on.

3. Creative nonfiction, I will note, is where my own creative journey beyond the discrete categories of prose and poetry began as well; it is a starting point that makes sense to me both as a creative writer and as a scholar.

4. An unexpected form might include “hermit crab” essays, as well as texts that exist as a kind of cousin to the “hermit crab” essay. Marisa Crane’s (2023) *I Keep My Exoskeletons to Myself* will serve as an example of the latter.

5. See, for example, *Female Masculinity* for Queer Studies scholar J. Jack Halberstam’s (1998) discussion of palatable representations of queerness.

6. Or, at minimum, *Exoskeletons* queers the mainstream and conventional conceptions of what a novel is for a contemporary American reader, as Carmen Maria Machado (2019) does with the memoir in *In the Dream House*, or as Natalie Wee (2022) does with poetry in *Beast at Every Threshold*.

7. The connections that Choe (2018) makes between queer literature and experimental literature in Korean fiction highlights the theorization that could take place in the connections between queer literature and experimental literature in other cultural contexts of creative writing, such as American writing.

8. The end goal of experimentation in queer literature will be posed throughout this essay as being tied to empathy, emotion, and interiority. However, this is intended to be merely one avenue of many possible avenues where such theorization might lead, depending on the scholar, the creative texts being analyzed, and the critical texts (and disciplines) called into the conversation.

9. Similarly, *When We Were Sisters* by Fatimah Asghar (2022) and *Wound from the Mouth of the Wound* by torrin a. greathouse (2020) combine prose and poetry in their texts.

10. Ristow coins this term – craft consciousness – in order “to shift creative writing toward processism, a set of diverse philosophical, educational, and cultural traditions that views reality and the individual writer as in a *constant state of change*” (2022: 2, emphasis original). This aligns with Baker’s ideas of queer becoming in creative writing.

11. Examples of more formally traditional texts might include a novel such as *The Haunting of Alejandra* by V. Castro (2023), an essay collection such as *Thin Skin* by Jenn Shapland (2023), or a poetry collection such as *The Tradition* by Jericho Brown (2019). These queer texts have recognizable generic and formal elements that would in many ways be legible to – and expected by – most audiences.

12. Ex: *The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions* by Larry Mitchell (2019)

13. And, it should be noted, no two marginalized minds are exactly alike in their complexities.

14. *Toward an Inclusive Creative Writing: Threshold Concepts to Guide the Literary Writing Curriculum* (2017).

15. *A Stranger’s Journey: Race, Identity & Narrative Craft in Writing* (2018).

16. *Craft in the Real World: Rethinking Fiction Writing and the Workshop* (2021).

17. *The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop: How to Decolonize the Creative Classroom* (2021).

18. *Voice First: A Writer’s Manifesto* (2022).

19. *Craft Consciousness and Artistic Practice in Creative Writing* (2023).

20. *Musing the Margins: Essays on Craft* (2020).

21. It is worth noting that, while these texts cover marginalized craft more broadly and certain identitarian contexts – such as race and, to a lesser degree, disability – more specifically, none maintain a full-text focus on queer craft/queer poetics. This highlights the potential for further study of queer poetics, and for further study of its relationship to experimentation in creative writing.

22. In terms of noun (queerness), adjective (queer), and verb (queering).

23. Ex: Queer and crip intersections, such as in Robert McRuer’s work (ex: the 2006 *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*), or crip queer of color intersections as explored in Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha’s works (ex: the 2015 *Dirty River: A Queer Femme of Color Dreaming Her Way Home* or the 2018 *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*).

24. The creative literature analyzed here has been released within the past decade, ranging from 2014 to 2023: *She of the Mountains* (2014), *The Girl and the Goddess* (2020), *I Keep My Exoskeletons to Myself* (2023), *Open Throat* (2023).

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